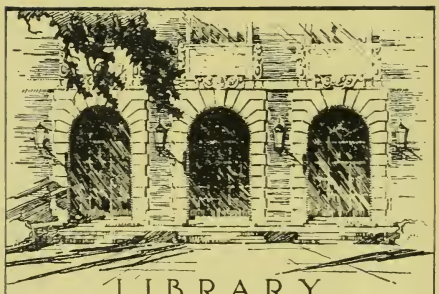

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MAROONED

VOL. II

MAROONED

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL

AUTHOR OF "THE GOLDEN HOPE," "THE WRECK OF THE 'GROSVENOR,'" "THE LADY MAUD," "A SEA QUEEN," "JACK'S COURTSHIP," "THE FROZEN PIRATE," ETC., ETC.

MAROON—To put a person ashore on an uninhabited island
Nautical Dictionary

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

AND NEW YORK

1889

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LONDON AND BUNGAY.

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CHAPTER I.

WE LOSE THE CABIN-BOY.

Two mornings after this, on going on deck shortly before the breakfast-hour, I found the weather changed. The high sun, the blue skies which had shone over us now for many days together, were gone. The atmosphere was gloomy, with a pale thickness that brought the sea-line to within cannon-shot. Under the lead-coloured gloom over the mastheads one could dimly catch sight here and there of a black curl of scud-like cloud blowing leisurely athwart our track; otherwise there was no break, no shadowed curve or line to tell of a denser or darker vapour yet above the warm and sallow

haze through which the wind was sweeping without dispersing it. The sea ran in a slopping sort of way that made a great noise about the brig's sides with notes of hollow plashing, the slap of a leap of water seething to its own recoil, the short, small roar of billows overspringing some backward scend ahead of them, like the groaning of surf tumbling in snow to the hidden drag of the undertow. You would have thought there was a strong windward tide running ; yet with all this briskness of surface play, I never saw the ocean wear a sulkier look. The glorious sparkling blue of its brine was gone ; 'twas now of a cold, sallowish green, thick and muddy with every heave ; as though under its heads of foam, and the short, conflicting runs of its small seas, it had been thickened into sluggishness by upheaval of ooze into its volume.

The atmosphere was like a tepid bath, and the brig was damp with it from her loftiest cloths to the deck from which I surveyed the scene. She was under all plain sail, the yards braced forward, but the studding-sail-booms were still rigged out, which was perhaps as

good as saying that old Broadwater found nothing more in the weather that had come down upon us than was visible to the bare eye. She was pushing through it dully, and tumbling uncomfortably, in a most sickening way indeed; insomuch, that for the first time during this voyage I felt absolutely uneasy, though the fresh air speedily relieved me of the disagreeable oppression. There was no weight of surge, and yet she could not have flopped about more drunkenly had a strong sea been running. First she would give a sharp dip forward; but before she could put her round nose well into it a trough would suddenly yawn under her counter, and oblige her to drop her stern sharply, and with a souse that would send a large dark-green, glass-clear curl of water thundering into foam away from her quarter; an instant after she would tumble to windward, as though collecting her energies for a good heel over to t'other side; but whilst you postured yourself for the slope of the deck, she would recover herself with a jerk that made you stagger again. I had never heard so much groaning aloft before. The mandrake is said to

shriek when dragged out by the roots ; so did every shroud, backstay, and halliard aboard the Iron Crown, to the fierce jerking strains put upon them by the giddy, capricious rolling of the spars. Every parrel delivered a groan of its own, every sheave squeaked like a rat in its block ; nor though the wind was of some little briskness had it power to keep the courses and even the topsails distended during the leeward plunges, when the heavy cloths would come in to the masts with a blow that sent blasts of noise through the air like boiler explosions or smart claps of thunder.

Broadwater was in charge. I stepped mechanically over to the compass to have a look at the card, though of course it was to be known by the lay of her yards that the brig was steering her true course. The captain was clothed in a long pea-coat and sou'-wester, and his red face, framed in the sea-helmet, showed methought this morning very sourly, with a harsh twist about his mouth that put the look of a sulky sneer into its ordinary, familiar, whistling expression. A large drop of moisture sparkled at the end of his nose. He stood

holding on to the weather-vang of the trysail-gaff, apparently as little able as I was to move about the decks. The watch had finished their business of washing down, the ropes were coiled away and everything was ship-shape fore and aft: but the drizzled, weeping aspect of the brig, with shadows of moisture lying in dark curves upon her canvas, and blobs of wet distilling from gray ropes and black shrouds, made her look singularly dejected and forlorn, and I could scarcely forbear a smile, as I glanced from the picture of her to the skipper's face, and witnessed the absurd correspondence between *his* damp sourness and *her* appearance.

He eyed me as if he would like to speak, but I took care that he should find no encouragement in the short "good-morning" that I called to him. The truth is, I had given him as wide a berth as I could possibly contrive since the hour when he had unfolded his scheme to me of capturing the half-blood. I had made up my mind on the matter, and therefore had no desire to hear him again on it. Indeed Miss Grant's advice had so worked in me that my attitude was perhaps more resolved and more sharply

accentuated than the occasion demanded. In short, it entered my head that for all I could tell the captain's scheme might finds its way to the forecastle; by what agency of course I could not have indicated, for I was sure that Gordon was not a man to talk. But, nevertheless, I knew that on shipboard there is a species of wizardry at work in the atmosphere, by whose operations the crew do somehow or other manage to obtain a dim intelligence of what passes even in whispers in the cabin; and I was resolved that if the captain's proposal to me should come to be guessed at by the sailors, or reach their knowledge in the indefinable manner in which news creeps through a ship at sea, they should perceive that I had no sympathy with it; which was only to be managed by letting them infer my opinion of Broadwater by my behaviour to him on deck.

It was a gloomy breakfast-table. The morning lay so foggily upon the skylight that I could scarcely distinguish Miss Grant's features without leaning towards her. There were fiddles on the table, but the quick rolls of the brig rendered them useless. A plate of bacon was

capsized on to Broadwater's knees, and I narrowly escaped being badly scalded by the sudden fetching away of the skipper's huge tea-pot, which to one sharp heave jumped like a live thing over the divisions, and poured its contents in a boiling stream within a couple of inches of my right leg.

"If we were not clear of the Gulf Stream," said I, "this should make a man believe himself in the heart of it."

"What's the matter with the Gulf Stream, sir," said Broadwater, "supposing this *was* it?"

"You have heard, I suppose," said I, almost amused by the excessive sourness in his face, "of vessels sailing with royals and studding-sails into the belt, and meeting ships coming out of it under close-reefed topsails?"

"Well, I *may* have heard of it, as you remark," he exclaimed; "but I haven't been going to sea all these years to believe all I hear at this time o' day."

There was a note of insolence in the old chap's voice that instantly started me on addressing Miss Grant with the completest air of unconsciousness of his presence that I could

command. Once I caught his eye, and the gleam of it was not a little malevolent, minute as the puncture was through which he stared. How unusually quarrelsome and bad-tempered he was this morning was to be noticed in his way of speaking to the cabin-boy. It was inconceivable that the poor lad should be able to cut anything but an intolerable figure on that staggering deck, and it was quite wonderful that he managed to scrape through his business of bringing the dishes along and waiting on us without breaking his neck, not to speak of what he carried. But Broadwater found him unendurable, heaped abuse on him whenever he had sufficiently emptied his mouth to furnish scope to his tongue, and finally exploded in a whole volley of coarse and brutal terms, which caused Miss Grant to half rise from her chair with a look at me to hand her to her cabin. But the old fellow left his seat at that moment and staggered on deck, with a farewell shake of his fist under the hapless boy's nose, whereupon my companion resumed her place.

Gordon arrived, looking gray in the twilight of the cabin, and wretched with the dogged

melancholy that hung upon him. He knuckled his forehead with a dismal gesture to Miss Grant, sat down and helped himself to a bit of beef, with the air of a man walking in his sleep. This indeed, to a certain extent, had been his mood ever since the night of the apparition of the luminous bow, but it was so accentuated this morning that the dolefulness of it was absolutely grotesque.

"It seems to me, Gordon," said I, "that a glass of three-finger rum and one-finger water would do you more good than that black fluid you're about to drink. The weather, I admit, is enough for the moment to make life appear as if it were formed of nothing but yellow fog and bilious dots. But, my good fellow, there is really no need for such a mute-like face as yours, as though you had taken a fancy to a hearse's plume to embellish your sou'-wester with, and were rehearsing the proper cast of countenance for it."

He rolled up his eyes to the skylight, and then gazed at me with the languishing expression of a sick man, but did not speak.

"Of all the most miserable voyages," I

continued, "recorded or unwritten, I'll venture to declare this tops the list."

"Pray don't say so, Mr. Musgrave," exclaimed Miss Grant. "Think of fire, famine, shipwreck, the uninhabited coast, or worse still, the coast inhabited by savages."

"This voyage ain't over yet," said Gordon, in the voice of a raven.

"I don't say it's *calamitous*," I went on. "Indeed, but for the consideration that your safety and comfort are involved, I should be much too happy to wish the voyage over." She smiled, and inclined her head to this as a mere commonplace of courtesy, and indeed I easily saw that she made nothing of it, and suspected nothing in it, from the serenity and steadfastness of her gaze. "Yet," I continued, "we must call it miserable. As if a fit of superstition ending in the suicide of a seaman shouldn't suffice, there comes the barbarous punishment of lashing a man to the mast. As though *that* were not enough, mutiny must follow, along with a horrid murder. And now here is Broadwater this morning with every instinct of bad temper and brutality in him forking out like the claws of a

cat at sight of a dog; whilst on top of all sits my good friend there, bowed down by some sort of speechless woe, for which I am sure that there is no remedy but a good pull at one of my choice old brandy bottles."

I started up, meaning to fetch the liquor, but he arrested me with a solemn wave of the hand.

"No, sir," he exclaimed, "there's nothing in brandy to do me good. It isn't *woe* that's a-worriting me. What it be I'm sure I can't tell. I believe the capt'n's clean off his head this morning. He came up a-cursing of you to me just now as if he'd imagined you and the half-blood was gone into partnership to take his life."

"Do you suppose he thinks this?" I cried, startled.

"No, no, sir," he replied; "I said *as if* he did. There's no telling what passes in such a mind as his."

"I do not see that his fancies, whatever they may be, need trouble us," said Miss Grant quietly.

"No," I exclaimed; "it's not the captain's

mind ; it's your face, Gordon. Turn to and give yourself a good hearty shaking, my lad, and so get rid of the longshore humour that's come to you with a view of the finest sight that ever mortal eye rested on. Why, man, we look to you for the only gleam of sailorly jollity that's to be witnessed aboard this old hooker. It was but the other day that you were laughing at the notions that dispatched the poor fellow Jesse Cooper over the side. Shake this temper out of you, Gordon."

He passed the back of his hairy hand over his forehead. "Well, sir," he exclaimed, "I will if I can. I hope there's nothing in the queer sensations that have come into me to agitate the lady, I'm sure. I'm but a plain sailor man, and never had no college to go to but the fok's'le, and don't feel that I've got any right to be sitting in the cabin of even such a brig as this, a-talking to a lady and gent like you and miss there. I'm sure I ask both of your pardons if I've at all agitated either of ye by my manner. Sailors are but mortal like other folks ; ye know that, Mr. Musgrave. The sperrits of the heartiest of them will fail

at times. It'll all come right, I dare say," and with that he left us.

Now all this, along with the darkness of the weather, the drizzle on the skylight, the vile tumbling of the brig, and the harsh groaning of the labouring fabric, was surely enough to render both Miss Grant and myself as gloomy and depressed as poor Gordon himself. I protest it made me feel exceedingly uncomfortable to know that the captain had gone on deck and abused me to the boatswain in terms which it was easy for my imagination to fit to his lips. One felt that everything was wrong aboard the brig, from the eyes of her to the transom, that she was no better than a complicated trap, of which if one piece of mechanism went wrong there was half-a-score more whose action was bound to be sure.

There was nothing to tempt one on deck. It was Broadwater's watch below, but he remained above throughout; why, I could not imagine, unless he was too irritable to rest in his cabin. Thick as the weather was, it was daylight, and one could see a mile at all events, and the risks therefore were as nothing compared with those

of that black night on which the pig had broken into my berth, and through which Broadwater would have slept soundly, no doubt, but for the uproar, as he had turned in very nearly drunk. The atmosphere was close below, and the lee skylight-lid lay open, and through it as I sat conversing with Miss Grant, I could hear the captain occasionally bawling in a voice whose harsh, hoarse note struck upon the ear with something of the smart of a blow from a missile on the flesh. Once I heard the men singing out, and gathered from the orders delivered by Gordon that they were trimming sail. The motion of the brig however continued abominable, spasms and throes of motion quite bewildering to the brain at times, accompanied by all sorts of ugly slopping sounds of water, hysteric sobbings and gurglings swelling into a semi-muffled, yearning roar as some windward roll would send a billow howling from the side. Reading was impossible; there was nothing to be made of chess or cards, and we could find no better diversion than sitting and talking.

I think it must have been about noon when I heard the captain's voice suddenly exerted in

a number of shouts in which he seemed to be repeating the same orders over and over again, but in the most angry, savage, threatening tones that could be imagined.

"What on earth can the wretched old man be at now?" said I. "I'll take a peep."

I threw a cloak over my shoulders, put on my cap, and went on deck. Broadwater was standing on the weather-side of the quarter-deck, gripping the main-royal backstay, and shouting to somebody on the fore, though I did not immediately look that way. Gordon was near the skylight, his hands buried in his coat-pockets, and his dejected face sulkily staring seawards with an air of petulant, gloomy unconcern upon him, as of a man who had passed through the stages of loathing and disgust into contemptuous indifference. I walked right aft so as to get out of the sphere of the skipper's little eyes; since, whilst I was anxious to see what was going on, I was also disposed to fear that if the old fellow caught me watching he might fall foul of me in his present humour before the sailors. I now noticed that the wind had come a point or two more free since early

morning, and that the yards were braced in to that extent. The foretopmast studding-sail had been set, but something was wrong with the block at the extremity of the boom, and the halliards had been slacked away and the sail hauled in great part down upon the forecastle, where it hung with the watch standing by ready to hoist away afresh when the difficulty aloft, whatever it was, had been remedied.

It is proper I should state here, for the information of those to whom sea-terms are unintelligible, that a studding-sail-boom is a long, smooth spar that reeves through irons fixed upon the yard to which it belongs, and that, when the studding-sail is to be set, is run out far beyond the ship's side for the extension of the foot of the cloths. There is no gear attached to it except the tack at the extremity, so that 'tis for all the world like one of those greasy poles which they project over the head of a moored craft on a regatta day, for marine Jack Puddings to walk out on.

Now as I stood near the wheel, the first object I saw was the figure of the cabin-boy, Billy, as he was called, jockeying the studding-

sail-boom at the distance of some three or four feet from the yard-arm. He was supposed to be sliding out to the end of it—astride it as though on horseback—but you saw at the first glance that the poor creature was in a mortal fright; that having been urged by the captain's threats to the point at which he had arrived, he was too terrified to advance, whilst the purple face of the old tyrant on the quarter-deck prohibited him from returning. At any time such a job as this would have been full of danger. Even at anchor on the motionless surface of a river, the task of sliding out to the extremity of a long, naked, and slippery boom, would not have been without its peril. The undertaking was now rendered so prodigiously dangerous by the peculiarly sharp, rapid, jerking, and dislocating heaves, staggers, and rolls of the brig, that the mere sight of the lad up there shocked me as though he were hanging by the neck, or being in any other way done to death by the man who continued to bawl out menaces to him.

"By Heaven!" I cried, with the quick, shuddering sensation of a recoil within myself, so to speak, "he'll be overboard in a minute."

"Yes, by the Everlasting! but if he goes for good, the one that'll follow him ain't fur off," said a low voice close to my side. I turned; it was Charles, the half-blood, who was standing at the wheel. I had not until this moment noticed him. One laughs often at descriptions in novels of the villain of the plot hissing out his threats and imprecations through his clenched teeth; but I protest that though it was impossible this man could have spoken with his teeth clenched, his utterance had the sharp, seething sound which is in the romancer's mind when he endeavours to express it. I started with a sudden uncontrollable shudder of aversion, and went some yards forward.

"Shove along out! shove along out!" roared Broadwater, with an angry sweep of his arm towards the extremity of the boom.

The hue of the sky against which the boy swung was a dull and dingy slate, here and there in it a deepening of shadow where some dark cloud sailed above the haze; and out of the horizon, that seemed to welter within reach of an arrow, the sea came running in short, snappish, colliding leaps, with a quarrelsome,

hound-like shouldering of one another, and fretful tossings of their heads of froth into the air, the foam falling back like showers of snow against the dingy background. The sailors stared up at the lad, but though now one and then another of them would make a movement as if he were about to spring into the rigging, no man offered to take the boy's place.

I don't believe however it was so much the peril of the work that held the fellows in a body looking on, as the feeling that the captain had started the wretched boy on this business as a "work-up job," and that he would not permit any other man to take his place. It was the most barbarous piece of cruelty you could conceive—out and away worse than the fastening of the half-blood to the mast. It was not only that the lad had not signed as a sailor, so that the captain had no right to turn him to work of that kind; of all the people aboard the brig the poor creature was the least qualified for so perilous an undertaking as sliding out to the extremity of a long boom that was buckling and jumping like a coach-whip to the tumbling vessel's thrash of spar and shear of yard-arm.

"Out with you! Shove along! By thunder! I'll make a *traveller* of you with the end of the tack! I'll have ye *hauled* out and made two blocks of and belayed if you don't bear a hand! There's no ile in that timber—no use your a-squeezing of it!—so out ye go now!—out ye go!"

The white face of the lad turned towards the captain, full of entreaty and terror. On a sudden his cap blew off. Trifling as the thing was, the mere sight of the headgear dropping with a whirl into the sea and showing black an instant ere smothered by a breaking wave, sent a shock through me.

"I can't get out, sir; I can't indeed, sir," cried the boy in a most miserable, whining voice. I noticed several of the men forward staring my way, as though wondering whether I meant to interfere, perhaps hoping to provoke me to do so with their looks. But remonstrance was too late, even if I had not satisfied myself, by observing the temper old Broadwater was in, that it would be idle. It was quite plain that the lad was incapable of working himself another foot along the boom; and

it seemed to me, from the despairful, clinging posture with which he hugged the spar, his trousers ridden up to his knees, and his thin legs and long naked feet swinging in sharp relief against the haze past them, that terror had rendered him incapable of returning. On a sudden the brig pitched sharply, all aslant; then with a stagger recovered herself, instantly following it by another sharp plunge and a heavy seething of water beaten off her weather-bow.

"Mind!" I cried at this moment, "the boy will be overboard."

As I spoke he swung under the boom, still clinging to it with his legs and arms.

"Come in! come in!" roared Gordon, rushing forward; "you can manage it, my lad; take your time. Up aloft some of ye and help him."

Three men sprang into the shrouds, but before they were five ratlines high the lad's legs dropped, and he swayed at the boom with his hands meeting upon it, his figure swinging like the end of a rope. Half-a-dozen throats shouted out as many suggestions. "Hold on, Billy! We'll have a bowline for ye

in a moment!" "Work your way in, Billy, hand over hand, lad!" "Don't let go, for Heaven's sake. There are men now running aloft to help ye!"

"In God's name," I cried, making a spring in my excitement towards Broadwater, "put your helm down before he lets go, that the brig's way may be checked when he's in the water!"

He did not answer me, but if ever human eyes flashed a curse at a man his did. There was a life-buoy aft, seized to the rail in the good old English style. Without a knife I could not free it. A steel blade was flourished close to my nose. "Here, sir, cut away with this; it's sharp enough for tougher stuff than laniards." I seized the knife that the half-blood extended to me from the wheel, severed the seizings, and returned the weapon to the fellow, with a horror springing into me even in that wild moment of excitement, to the thought that it was the same knife with which he had murdered the mate! I looked forward; the boy was gone, and the boom reeled naked against the sky. At the same moment, "Man overboard! Down hellum! down hellum!" came sweeping aft in a perfect

hurricane roar from the lips of the seamen gathered forward, and the deck re-echoed the clattering of their feet as they came racing in a body to the quarter-boat. I looked over the side, and there on the quarter lay the boy on his back floating with his arms out. I sprang on to the rail to fairly heave the life-buoy, and whilst I stood in that posture for the space of a breath, *I saw the poor creature smile at me.* I vow to God it was a thing almost heart-breaking in its way. It may have unnerved my arm; I know not, I am sure. I did my best, flung the buoy with my full strength and as a sailor would, but it fell far short of him; and though the half-blood ground the wheel down till you would have thought that the passion of the creature had given him strength to twist the head sheer off the rudder it belonged to, yet the lubberly bows of the brig came round so leisurely against the conflicting beat of the snarling and worrying seas, that the floating figure seemed a mile off in less time than it would have taken a man to put up a prayer to God for him.

CHAPTER II.

WE LOSE FOUR MEN.

THEN happened a scene of bitter confusion. Though the men, whilst they stood watching the lad forward, must have guessed as clearly as I what would happen, they had said nothing; but now that the boy was overboard and drowning, they broke into a hundred execrations against the captain whilst they cast the gripes of the lee quarter-boat adrift and cleared away the falls ready for lowering. The uproar was increased by Broadwater's vociferations to them to bear a hand; but each cry of his served but as a challenge to the rage of the men, who roared back every choicest flower of the forecastle dialect which they could summon to their lips. However, they worked nimbly for all that, and in a few minutes the boat, with a

couple of men in her and Gordon in the stern-sheets overhanging the stern as he fitted the rudder to the pintles, was swinging at the davits. "Lower away handsomely!" The little craft sank out of sight down the side, and in a few minutes was leaping like an india-rubber ball upon the seas, to the desperate drag of the two fellows at the oars.

The shouts from the captain now brought the sailors to the maintopsail brace, and whilst the men were pulling at the ropes to get the yards aback, hauling in a delirious sort of way, with temper ringing menacingly in the songs with which they accompanied their work, Miss Grant arrived on deck, and spying me before I saw her, instantly approached with a hurried, anxious, "What is it *now*, Mr. Musgrave?"

"Why, another murder, bad as Bothwell's, if there be justice in heaven to decide!" I cried, for I was thinking of the drowning lad's smile at the moment, and the mere having to tell her what had happened made me feel as mutinously savage as, I warrant me, the darkest-minded of the men who were running about.

She brought her hands together in a gesture

of terror; there was real fear in the eyes with which she swept the sea. She seized me by the arm, and exclaimed with a shuddering glance towards Broadwater, "Another murder do you say, Mr. Musgrave? Oh, if so—if so—" and then she stopped with a bewildered stare at the jumbled roll of green seas that came with staggers which shook them into snow out of the windward thickness.

I had shocked and startled her from the brave hold she had hitherto kept upon her feelings, and could have cursed myself for my brutal, uncouth candour. "I have put it too strongly," I cried, eager to subdue in her eyes something of that light of horror and fear which gave a kind of madness to their beauty. "It is not murder in the sense you think it. It is but another act of miserable cruelty which I fear must end in the death of our cabin-boy."

"Tell me about it!" she exclaimed, in a breathless way, securing her hold of my arm by clasping the fingers of both hands upon it.

I related the incident as swiftly as I could speak it, and I do not think I shall ever forget the look of tragic loathing and indignation in

her face when she turned to glance at Broadwater over her shoulder as he stood on the other side of the deck, huskily bawling instructions to the crew.

"Where is the boat?" she cried impetuously.

I pointed in the direction in which I had last seen it, and walked right aft with her and peered into the windy thickness, but could see no signs of the little fabric; nothing like it saving a darker ridge of green here and there which would melt into foam even as I watched. I abhorred the obligation of having to address the half-blood, but excitement was working in me like a fever, and I could think of little more than that the boat which I had in full view a minute or two before Miss Grant came on deck was now out of sight.

"Do you see anything of her?" I said to him.

"She went out of sight on a sudden," he answered. "She's afloat right enough I reckon; the mist will have swallowed her up." He leaned from the wheel, pointing with a small, beautifully-shaped, but discoloured hand out to sea upon the weather quarter.

The brig's way was stopped, so far at least as

forging ahead went; but of her leeward trend dead along the path of the wind the nimbleness might be gathered by looking over the side, where you saw the oil-like smoothness left by her to the distance of a pistol-shot, beyond whose verge the seas were breaking as though they were kept at bay to that point by a coating of oil upon the waters. I thought Broadwater must be stark mad to keep his brig hove-to under a press which every moment was driving her deeper into the obscurity that hid us from the boat as she was hidden from us by it. The vessel was under royals and flying-jib, and to such a surface, helped as the fabric also was by the seas, our drift would be rapid beyond endurance; yet not a sheet was started or a halliard let go. The old man stood on the weather-side, leaning upon the rail, and fixedly gazing seaward under the thatch of his sou'-wester; forward, both watches—the whole of the crew in short, as many of them as were left—overhung the bulwarks pointing and talking, with one man half-way up the fore-shrouds, swinging out from a ratline, and his left hand shading his eyes as he bent his gaze at the

brownish drizzle upon the near horizon. Five minutes passed; nothing was done, and nothing said that reached our ears. The captain held his motionless posture, staring as though fascinated. One heard nothing but the wearisome sobbing and plashing of waters, the yeasty seething of brine to the chop of the cutwater forward, the simmering of foam hissing in recoil from the smart shock of the descending counter, with the cheerless clank of wheel-chains and jar of rudder, the melancholy clatter of wet spare booms, the rushing noise of wind aloft to the drunken weather lurches of the brig. Suddenly old Broadwater sprang erect from his squared arms, and came rolling along to where we stood.

"See anything of the boat, sir?" he cried.

"Nothing," I answered, scarcely able to tell him so, for my aversion almost overpowered my faculty of speaking.

"Forward there," he bawled, turning his face towards the forecastle, "any one amongst ye see anything of the boat?"

"Nothing," came back the response, in so

sulky a swing through the wind, that it made one think of the sudden dead flap of a sail in the midnight obscurity of an electric storm that has not yet burst. The old man struck his hip violently with the flat of his hand, drove both fists deep into his pockets, then started as if to walk, but changed his mind, and came to the rail again, and stood looking with a creeping consternation in his face, before which one saw the temper in it fading away.

My feelings made me reckless. I said to him roughly and defiantly, "You'll lose your boat if you don't strip your ship. Do you know, man, that you're driving dead to leaward at the rate of three or four miles an hour?"

He sent a glance at the half-blood before answering me, and then in a half-choked voice gasped out with an oath, "If there's a mutiny, you'll be the ringleader! I knows ye; I've been following of ye. *You* teach me my business!" He pulled his fist out of his pocket to shake it in my face. I at first imagined by this gesture that he meant to attack me, and quickly released Miss Grant's hold that I might be ready for him. Muscular as he was, with

no lack of weight "of beef" in him, as sailors say, I believe he would have found his match in me at that moment; for his charging me with being the ringleader of a mutiny was an insult to make fire of blood running by luck of disposition in a much gentler stream than mine, I am sorry to say, ever did. But very quietly Miss Grant stepped in front of me, and the old fellow, with a second look at the half-blood, rolled over to the companion, where he stood a few moments staring seawards, and then with an air of sudden hurry vanished below.

He reappeared after a brief absence, grasping an old blunderbuss, the bell-shaped muzzle of which was almost big enough to have received his head. He ran to the bulwarks with it close to where we stood. I confess I was not a little alarmed by the sight of so formidable a weapon in the hands of this enraged old man, and I watched his movements with no small anxiety, as I could not imagine what he intended to do with the piece. On a sudden he lifted the stock to his shoulder, drooped his pear-shaped nose over the trigger, and screwing up one eye as though he were taking aim

at a bird in the air, let fly. The explosion could not have been more noisy had he discharged a swivel cannon, and the recoil of the piece was so violent that it came very near to flinging him on to his back. However, I perceived that his object was to signal the brig's whereabouts to the boat, and I should have been glad to help him by discharging another musket, or blunderbuss, if the brig owned a second, but was kept quiet by the memory of his insult, and by the expression of ugly temper upon his face. When he had discharged the gun, he whipped out a great powder-flask and proceeded to reload, but poured in so much powder, whilst he rammed in so large and stubborn a lump of newspaper, that all in silence I took Miss Grant by the hand and led her some distance forward, where on the other side of the deck, should the crazy old weapon explode, we would be out of reach of the flying fragments. Having charged his blunderbuss, he approached the rail again, and taking aim at some imaginary object with as much solicitude of posture, indeed, as if he was shooting grouse or snipe, and screwing up his left eye so

tightly, that I burst into a laugh at the sight of that side of his face, showing in a sort of purple blurr of wrinkles against the rusty barrel and the dull leaden shadow beyond, he pulled the trigger a second time. The piece exploded with a great blaze of light, and the blast of a little thunder-shock, and down he tumbled to it, quite as I had expected; only instead of measuring his length, he smote the deck heavily with his hams, and preserved a sitting posture, with the blunderbuss across his knees, and his face full of astonishment and anger.

Presently he rose and put the firearm on the skylight, and went to the rail. He stared long and earnestly, then shouted to the men forward to know if they saw anything; afterwards gaped aloft at his canvas, with a slow bringing of his eyes down to where we stood. But for the temper and brutality of the man I should have felt sorry for him.

"Do you think he will be able to recover the boat?" Miss Grant asked.

"I fear not," I answered, "unless the weather should miraculously clear within the next half-hour; and even then the chances should

be all against recovery, unless the old fool promptly shortened sail down to his topsails—nay, down to bare poles."

"But surely, Mr. Musgrave, we are not likely to *lose* the boat?"

"At sea things grow horribly serious in a minute," said I.

I crossed with her again to the weather-rail, and telescoping my hands, sent a long, long searching look into the length of the dingy shadow of mist, a little way past the line of which one saw the phantasmal welter of the seas and the scarce determinable flash of foam, vague as an outline in still dark waters, to where they melted into the blindness of the haze. The first clamorous wrath of the men forward had been changed, by waiting and peering, into a sort of angry uneasiness. There were nine of them; they hung in a row along the bulwarks, one repeatedly leaning inboards to look past another aft at the skipper, as though full of sullen, irritable wonder at this waiting and drifting scheme of his. But he made no sign. He went to the binnacle, and lifting the hood laid the sharp of his hand across the card,

as though seeking to arrive by memory at the bearings of the boat. I suspected in him some trick of seamanship above my knowledge in his keeping the vessel under all plain sail hove-to; but I could not bring myself to address him. Ten minutes passed—ten minutes of silence along our decks—all of us meanwhile staring our hardest to windward, not a syllable coming from forwards to break the dreary washing noises of water, and the sounds of the restless straining of the yerking, rolling, and plunging brig. On a sudden, Broadwater roared out, "Swing the maintopsail-yard! Sweat everything fore and aft! Get them jib-sheets flattened in!"

The sailors, eager to be doing, sprang to his commands; I quitted Miss Grant to help them, and dragged with the gangs till the yards were pointed to the wind as far as they would go; but there were no songs. Here and there a fellow would raise a low monotonous yowling that the others might take time from his notes; but there was no cheeriness in the sailors' voices, and such few cries as were raised were more like the melancholy groaning

of sufferers than the hearty piping of seamen at work. The maintack was boarded in silence, and the jigger clapped on to such sheets and running gear as demanded the extra purchase, as though the brig's company consisted of undertakers' mutes. The wind seemed to come fresher now that the vessel was looking up to it close-hauled, and under the great pressure of her cloths she lay over until her lee-channels were awash amid the smother of spume there, though it was the mere spluttering of her round bows throwing the heads of the seas into cataracts from her that made the tumbling whiteness alongside; for I question if her progress, jammed as she was till the weather-leeches of her royals and topgallant-sails were hollowed aback, was as great as her drift had been when her topsail was to the mast.

It was clear now that the captain's intention was to "ratch" for the boat, as he himself would have termed it—by which I mean that it was his design to beat to windward in short tacks in the direction in which the boat had last been seen; and maybe he had kept full

sail on the brig for the convenience of handling her promptly, although I held to my opinion that he had blundered grievously in holding her under cloths that must have given her a drift of hard upon a league since he had first hove her to. It was past two o'clock, and as I saw there was no chance of getting any dinner that day, I procured some refreshments from our private stock, and Miss Grant and I made a hurried, uncomfortable meal in the cabin. Even whilst we sat there Broadwater put the brig about again, and as I felt that it was my duty to help him in such an extremity as this, I hastened on deck and assisted the men in pulling and dragging. The breeze had freshened yet, the seas were running more steadily, but the blank around the horizon had thickened, and there was a deeper shade in the dinginess on high that made it look as if it floated with a stoop towards our masts; but there was no break in it, no faintest flaw for the light behind to steal through, whilst the first weak drizzle of it had thickened into a small, fine rain—so warm that you did not feel the

moisture until the wind had chilled it—which blew transversely in horizontal lines over the bow, sometimes clouding up into a gush of white smoking mist like a burst of steam from a boiler, that made a blind stare of the look of the sea till the plunge of the wind with a long cry drave it clear of us.

It was no weather for Miss Grant to show herself on deck in, but she declined to remain below; so I made her as snug as I could with wraps and a waterproof-cloak, and she remained by my side, searching the cold, green, frothing tumble for any black speck that should denote the boat, as all hands of the rest of us did. Whenever Broadwater had his tacks aboard, he sent a couple of hands aloft to the fore and main-topmast cross-trees, with two more in the fore and main rigging just under the tops, and many an earnest glance would I direct at the men in the hope of detecting in the posture of any one of them that his attention had been taken, and that he would be singing out in a minute and pointing. The misery of that time comes back to me strongly. It

is not in my pen to express the quality of depressing melancholy that was put into that thick, sombre, damp day, with its cheerless whistling and howling of wind aloft, and the gray sails darkening yet to the beating of the rain, and the chill and stormy washing of water from the bows of the vessel, by thoughts of the lost boat away out in the darkening gloom yonder, and of the anguish of expectation and fear that would fill the minds of the men in her, as, riding to their oars—for they would have long since abandoned the labour of rowing—they leaned over the low gunwale, peering past each green, glimmering curl of sea for any smudge upon the wall of vapour that had closed around them which should indicate the presence of our brig.

They would, of course, be without food or water. Small chance of any such discipline as Broadwater was equal to providing in this way for the hurried dispatch of a vessel's boats!

"Do you think," Miss Grant said to me, "that the poor fellows will be able to live in such a sea as this?"

"Impossible to say," I replied, with a look

at the remaining boat that was of the size and shape of the other; "every wave has had a snappish run throughout. Yet the men are sailors, and will know how to manage if management be practicable. I wonder if they picked up the boy."

"I fear the worst," she exclaimed, with a tremble in the parting of her lips to the sweep of the breeze, whilst from the whiteness of her face amid the twilight of her hood that covered her head, her dark eyes shone out bright with a light that was feverish with brilliance.

"Why?" I asked.

"I believe this to be the fulfilment," she answered, "of Gordon's prophetic melancholy. It was the shadow of this event that lay upon him."

I shook my head. "There was no prophetic depression in the other two; at least one may reasonably suppose so. Of the three, probably Gordon was the most prosaic. Why, since there were four men to perish to-day—supposing that they *do* perish—I include the cabin-boy—why, I ask, to one of

them only should the future whisper? No, no; Gordon would have been gloomy whether this wretched business had happened or not."

"I fear the worst for them," she persisted. "Is not the air darkening rapidly, too! Should the night fall without our sighting them—oh, Mr. Musgrave, what a dreadful fate!—what a dreadful fate!"

She swept her hands to her eyes, but dropped them quickly, and running to the rail gazed seawards! and I think had the hour been one of gravest peril to ourselves, instead of to the poor fellows tossing about somewhere out in the windward bleakness, I must have found a moment to admire—and with a stirring of wonder in my admiration too—the character of tragic beauty her face took with the grief, and pity, and eagerness in it, as the flash of the wind swept her hood clear of the soft brown of her disordered hair, and left her lineaments plain against the green hills, and blowing froth, and shadowy steep of the scene of heaven and ocean beyond.

The gathering darkness which she had

noticed before I did was to prove a squall. You heard the long moan of it ere it had leapt clear of the near haze, and revealed its approach by the glaring rush of waters at its base. Already Broadwater was carrying on till the covering-board was flush with the water over the side. "Let go royal and t'gallant halliards!" he bawled. "Down flying jib, up mainsail!" and as these last words left his mouth the squall struck the vessel. I had foreseen one consequence, and had provided against it by whipping a rope's-end round Miss Grant's waist, otherwise, to the sudden, fierce inclination of the deck, she must have fallen to leeward as one might slip down the roof of a house. The angle was so extreme that it was almost impossible to stir. The halliards had been let go, but the slope of the masts prevented the yards from travelling. "Over with the helm! over with the helm!" shrieked Broadwater. I sprang to the lee-spokes to assist the fellow who had relieved the half-blood, and who, though he was straining with set teeth, seemed unable to stir the wheel by so much as a spoke. It was now a picture of giddy com-

motion and bewildering uproar for a long five minutes. The brig was so pressed down, that though we had got the helm jammed hard up, I feared for some moments that she would not pay off. You saw the yeast blowing like cream over the lee-rail, and it was like soapsuds, as high as a man's waist, the whole length of the lee-scuppers. Sheets had been slackened away, or let go, and the rattle of canvas shook the vessel to her heart. The squall was a heavy one, and it blew with a voice of thunder out of the thickness; and what with the roaring sound of the blast on high—an independent noise that dominated all other sounds with the violent ring of gusts or guns echoing through the rushing wind—and what with the slapping of liberated folds of canvas, the hollow blows of seas upon the exposed weather-side of the hull, Broadwater's shouts, the cries of the men, it was a scene that might have made even an old sailor think it about time to go to prayers. Fortunately however the captain's wits were equal to an emergency of this kind. He bellowed lustily indeed, but his orders were right. On the mainsail being hauled up, and

the trysail smothered, the brig paid off, and as she recovered something of an even keel, whilst she gradually presented her stern to the wind, the yards descended the masts, instantly relieving the heavy strain up there ; and before it we bowled—though towards what quarter of the sea I never thought of looking—with topsail-yards on the caps, the topgallant-sails and royals blowing out like flags from the grip of their clewlines and leech-lines, with the hauled-down jibs making the booms buckle again to the heavy dance of the folds, which the pitch of the vessel would souse and bring up streaming till the air beyond the head was white from the foam ripped away from them by the wind.

However, though full of weight and spite, it was but a squall, and the scream of it had presently fined down into the familiar moaning of the early blast. The brig's company was now a short-handed crew for the work that was to be done, and as every pair of hands was of the utmost consequence, I sang out to Broadwater from the wheel that I should be happy, if he had no objection, to stick to the post, that the man whose trick it was might assist

the others. He assented with a wave of his hand. Miss Grant came and stood beside me. The crew worked with a will, thinking perhaps that the lives of the men in the boat away out upon the dirty, shrouded jumble—though God knows where they would be *now*—might depend upon their smartness. But it was three-quarters of an hour before the sailor whom I had relieved came to take the wheel from me again, by which time the brig was once more close-hauled under topsails, main-top-gallant-sail, foresail, and trysail, eating her way into the thickness, that was denser than ever it had been at any other time of the day, and that was already deepening in shade to the gathering shadows of an early night above it. Yet till the close of the second dog-watch Broadwater went on ratching in short boards, the men working without a murmur, without any hint of mutinous reluctance in their movements, for the hope they yet had of surging within sight of the boat. But at eight o'clock it was black night—the blacker for rain and haze—the seas were shouldering blocks of gloom, with wan glares of foam here and there, and

a smart rattling of wet flinging to the ear like discharges of musketry from the obscurity along the waist to the forecastle.

I was then below with Miss Grant, both of us as wearied as if we had shared in the toils of the seamen, and as anxious about the look-out as we were depressed by the incidents of the day. But for our private stock of provisions, no food would have crossed our lips, for the cook had been called from his galley to help work the ship ; no man had been told off to wait upon us aft, and we must have gone to bed after a fast lasting from breakfast, but for the tins of cooked delicacies, the tongues, biscuits, and wines I had been wise enough to liberally provide ourselves with.

It was two bells in the first watch when Broadwater came below. I had long before trimmed and lighted the cabin-lantern, and was sitting at the table near Miss Grant smoking a cheroot, and endeavouring to extract a little cheerfulness of mind out of a glass of brandy-and-water. This was the first time the captain had left the deck since he had fetched his old blunderbuss. He threw down his sou'-wester

that was streaming with wet, pulled off his shaggy pea-coat, which sparkled to the lantern-light with the moisture upon it as though it were crystallized, and all in silence opened a locker, took out a knife and fork, a large cube of corned beef upon a tin plate, a couple of sea-biscuits, a bottle of rum, and a tin pannikin; and then sitting down, squared his elbows and fell to with the avidity of a famished hound, never offering to speak. However, it was ridiculous to suppose that I was to be kept in ignorance of such arrangements as he had made, and such schemes as he had decided upon; and as it was no moment to recall his insult, I waited until he had finished his supper, particularly keeping silent until he had drained his pannikin, and then said bluntly, "I suppose you've given up all hope of finding the boat?"

"All hope," he answered huskily, taking a surly squint at me with his little heartless eyes.

"You are now without a mate," said I, feeling Miss Grant's hand coming to my arm with a sudden pressure of her fingers to the un-

controllable dismay which followed Broadwater's hopeless answer. "You are now in a quandary, and can command me if you like."

"Command ye in what way?" he answered, filling his pannikin afresh.

"I'll take the mate's berth if you choose, but of course only to the extent of helping you in the navigation of the vessel."

"Thank'ee," he answered, in his roughest manner. "I hope to be able to do without you."

"I'm very glad indeed to hear it," said I, and indeed I spoke the truth. "But you surely do not intend to keep a look-out day and night alone?" I added, for it seemed to me unimaginable that he should find a man forward fit to entrust the charge of the brig to whilst he was taking rest.

He appeared to struggle with his temper, as though he could not force his inclination to answer me through his bad and sullen humour.

Miss Grant suddenly said, "Captain Broadwater, we have a *right* to know what measures you have taken for our safety." Her imperious look appeared to affect him as a command.

"You'll not suppose, mum," said he, "that I should be down here a-taking of it easy, with the idea," he continued, dragging his great watch out and looking at it, "of turning in in a few minutes for a snatch of rest, if I hadn't left matters ship-shape up above," with a jerk of his thumb at the deck.

"I am glad you have found somebody you can trust," said I.

"I dessay ye are," said he, "and so am I, I'm sure;" and then rising and returning the remains of his supper and his bottle of rum to the locker whence he had extracted them, he picked up his coat and sou'-wester and went to his berth.

It might have made the stoutest-hearted man feel a bit nervous to learn that this brig was virtually abandoned by her captain to her crew, who were full of mutiny and hatred of him, whilst *he* lay snoring below. Of course, seeing how matters had come about, Broadwater could not help himself; by which I mean that it was impossible for him to remain in sole charge of the deck night and day until Rio was reached; therefore, since he would not let me act as mate

—and it was quite conceivable that the old fool may have imagined me as mutinously disposed towards his discipline as he had that afternoon insolently affirmed me to be—it was necessary for him to appoint some forecastle hand to the post; but it was a sort of surrender that filled me with uneasiness. I did not attempt to conceal my fears from Miss Grant; indeed she understood the danger of our situation as well as I.

"Any man," I exclaimed, "would scarcely conceive it possible that an old sea-captain such as Broadwater should coolly go to bed and, supposing he sleeps till midnight, leave his brig absolutely at the mercy of her crew till then—at the mercy of a set of men whose hatred of him all through must have been immeasurably heightened to-day by his barbarous treatment of the poor cabin-boy, and the loss of men that followed. But then, what is the wretched old creature to do? He must get some rest during the twenty-four hours, or else entirely lose the very little sense that he was born with. I'll step on deck and see if I can make out who it is that has charge."

It was a black night. The brig had been brought to her course again, though no doubt some men in Broadwater's situation would have kept their vessel hove-to till dawn, in the hope of picking up the missing boat. The dusk was too thick to enable me to make out what canvas we were under. There was not much weight of wind however, but it was charged with damp, and one found a heaviness in it for that reason perhaps when the weather-roll of the vessel brought it in a gust to the face. I walked right aft to the helm, unable to distinguish anybody on deck, then caught sight of the face of a man named Andrew Wilkins, who stooped his head at the moment into the yellow sheen flowing out of the binnacle to get a better view of the card.

I said to him, "Who has charge?"

"Why, the blooming cook," he answered, with a low laugh.

"The *cook?*" I cried, thinking he joked.

He laughed again, but without merriment, and said, "Yes, sir; it's old Drainings as is boss just now."

"Where is he?" said I, drawing away from

the glare of the binnacle-lamp to look into the darkness forward; but it was not to be penetrated.

"Somewheres to wind'ard, sir, if he ain't gone and turned in," he answered.

I was in the act of groping my way to the weather-side, when it flashed upon me that I might be acting rashly in showing uneasiness or exhibiting inquisitiveness; so I just said in a careless voice to the fellow at the wheel, "'Tis strange for a captain to go to the galley for a chief mate. Perhaps the cook may have been a shipmaster, forced by adversity into boiling beef for sailors. I suppose he would know what to do should heavy weather come along?"

"I heard the capt'n tell him what to do," answered the man. "Should anything happen, he's to hammer the deck with a handspike over the capt'n's head. That's about as much as can be expected of a cook."

"Well," said I, "this is a queer sort of voyage anyhow, as the Yankees would say. Good-night." And with that I made my way to the hatch, looking into the blackness on the weather-deck for the cook's figure, but without seeing

him, though I don't say he was not there, for the sky was of a raven hue; the very substance of the quarter-boat melted into it, and the eye sought in vain for a line of shroud, or for any faintest configuration of canvas on high.

"The cook in command!" cried Miss Grant, when I gave her the news; "it is ridiculous! . . . It is dreadful, Mr. Musgrave!"

I thought so too, though I could not forbear a laugh at the very fancy of it, spite even of the rebuke my momentary merriment found in the startled expression of her eyes.

"I suppose," said I, "that he is the one man on board who enjoys the captain's confidence. He may be the only creature honestly disposed, for all we know, and let us believe that Broadwater has guessed it. After all, I dare say he is as well able to keep a look-out as any other man in the vessel; and absurd as the notion is, yet on reflection I believe old Broadwater to be right for once, and that our slumbers are more likely to be secure with Master Cookee stumping the quarter-deck with a handspike ready to thunder the skipper into vigilance, than were one of the sailors in charge."

However, though after sitting together another hour I induced her to withdraw to her cabin, it took me a long while to persuade myself to follow her example, and by that time it was hard upon midnight. Once or twice I looked through the hatch, but the blackness as before hung extraordinarily thick; there was nothing to be seen, and the wet in the wind made me glad to return to the shelter of the cabin. The brig rolled uneasily, but the motion was comparatively steady, no longer the half-paralyzing jumps and souses of the morning and afternoon. There was a heavy gloom upon my spirits. It was not only the memory of the sight of the cabin-boy clinging in terror to the boom, Broadwater's red face full of threats and menacing gestures, and the smile the poor lad gave me as he swept astern; there was the thought of Gordon and the two fellows in the boat; the feelings that would be in them, supposing them still alive, as they tossed in their tiny cockle-shell upon the dark hills of sea, without the leanest phantom of star for them to rest their eyes upon, without a fragment of biscuit to appease their hunger, or a drop of

fresh water to moisten their lips. These were fancies to put such a chill into the atmosphere of the cabin even, that one shuddered as to an icy blast to the mere muffled hum of the wind moaning in the rigging. I rose, for sitting below was like keeping a watch without any purpose in it; and besides, if any one of the sailors should peer through the closed skylights, and spy me leaning with folded arms against the bulkhead wide awake, it might enter the minds of the whole of them to believe that I was in league with the captain, practically keeping a look-out for him, though covertly; and I tell you the mere idea of this sent me to my cabin right off.

About ten minutes after I had tumbled into my bunk I heard a dull pounding noise, and instantly sat up in bed, not a little alarmed by the strange unusual sound, until it occurred to me that it might probably be the cook beating with his handspike over the captain's head to arouse him. The lamp in my cabin was alight, though I had dimmed it. To make sure of that strange battering noise, I went softly to my door and looked out. The door that shut

off the after-berths stood open, hooked to the bulkhead, and I had a clear view of a great part of the state cabin, including the companion-steps past the table. After an interval of a minute or two the pounding noise was repeated, and now I was certain that it was the cook beating with a handspike. I continued to peer, showing however only as much of my head past the door as enabled me to use my eyes, for I had no mind to be caught keeping such a look-out as this, either by Broadwater or anybody else in the brig. At the same time I was anxious to make sure that the captain responded to the cook's summons, for I felt that it would be possible for me to obtain some rest with the knowledge that the captain had charge of the vessel. A third time the cook pounded, on this occasion very noisily, and with so many hard thumps that one would have thought the hands were caulking the decks, or, worse still, endeavouring to beat some planks out. The fellow was evidently growing impatient, and he used his handspike as though he meant to let the captain know that he wanted to turn in. Shortly after the third thunderous call, Broad-

water came out growling like an old dog, and giving the cook a number of hard words, as though indeed the man stood before him. But first he rolled to his locker, muttering his abuse of the cook without intermission, until he silenced himself with a full pannikin of rum. He then, after a slow look round, went on deck, and I returned to my bunk ; but four bells had struck before I fell asleep, so incessantly was I haunted by the vision of the drowning lad, by thoughts of the missing boat, by recollection of the strange melancholy that had fallen upon the spirits of Gordon, by contact as one might say with the mysterious sheen of the cold bow of light we had sailed through, and above all by considerations of Miss Grant's and my safety aboard this brig, with a drunken old tyrant for captain, and a cook for chief mate, and as ship's company a short-handed crew charged to the throat with mutiny, with one malignant and active principle of evil amongst them in the shape of the half-blood, to whom the Iron Crown's arrival at Rio or any other port meant death.

CHAPTER III.

I TAKE COMMAND.

I WAS awakened by a sharp, persistent knocking on my cabin-door. "Who is there?" I called out, scarcely yet awake.

"The crew wants a word with ye, sir," exclaimed a deep-throated voice outside.

"Eh, what's that?" I cried, instantly startled into broad wakefulness.

"The crew 'ud be glad to have a talk with ye, sir," repeated the leather-lunged voice, the tones of which, though I might have had some memory of them had I heard them on deck, sounded most harshly unfamiliar, even malevolent, in the privacy and retirement of these after-cabins.

"All right," I exclaimed; "give me a minute or two to dress. Who are you?"

"Terence Mole, sir."

"Ha!" said I, "and where are the others?"

"All of 'em in the cabin, saving the chap at the wheel, and Charles, who's keeping a look-out."

There was broad daylight on the ocean, as a glance through the scuttle assured me; the flash of sunlight came to the glass of the screwed-up port in a fine-weather tremble off the waters, with a commingling of atmospheric blueness that made one know there was plenty of clear azure overhead. It was natural that I should wonder with all my might what the crew could want with me as I dressed myself, but not hastily; for let what might have happened, I was resolved to oppose an aspect at least of composure to whatever might befall, and the first condition of dignity was a leisurely observance of the wish of the crew to see me. I looked at my watch, punctually timed by every day's meridian, and found the hour ten minutes to five. I dressed myself fully, lingering to wash my face and hands and brush my hair; trifling things to talk about indeed, but useful to recall as an instance at all events of self-

control, which to this day I am proud to remember; for let me tell you, knowing the posture of the men as I did, it was enough to throw a heartier mind than mine off its balance, to be suddenly aroused from a deep sleep by the wooden knuckles of a sailor, and to collect with a half-conscious ear from his harsh, gruff accents that the seamen of the brig wanted a word with me.

I stepped into the little passage with a glance at Miss Grant's door, which was closed, though I had no doubt she was wide awake within, and had overheard the sailors' message to me. There were eight men in the cabin, four of them seated at the table; the tall seaman, Terence Mole, leaned against a stancheon with his arms, naked to the elbows, folded upon his breast; the sixth—the cook—squatted at the foot of the companion-steps; two others marched to and fro with their hands buried in their breeches-pockets; but they came to a halt when they saw me. The novelty of the sight of these rough fellows seated or lounging about an interior which I, with a sailor's experiences in me, knew that at ordinary times they would

think of, in their own sea-parlour, as a sort of holy ground in which no foremast Jack was ever to be heard of, unless he came to catch a pig or to holystone the deck of it, was, I protest, as much a shock in its way as if one of the men to my approach had saluted me with a levelled pistol. The eastern sunshine streamed upon the skylight, and the place was full of the brilliance of the morning. I noticed a sort of shagged, haggard, worried look in two or three of the hairy, weather-lined faces. Used as I was to their attire of duck-breeches, loose shirts, Scotch and other caps, and half-boots—though some of them were unshod—yet the mere presence of them in the cabin rendered their garb as strange in my sight as if I had never beheld it before, and I seemed to find in the first presentment of them the most genuine imaginable aspect of outlawry, abominably in conformity with every fancy, recollection, or imagination of mutiny that could occur to an observer. The fellows who were seated at the table rose when I entered; Mole quitted his lounging attitude; and the cook, a stout, pale, sandy-haired, man, writhed himself on to his

feet off the ladder. I came to a stand a foot or two in advance of the doorway which conducted to the after-berths, that Miss Grant might hear what I said, and gather from my language the import of the speech of the others if their syllables should not be always audible to her.

"What is it, men?" I said.

Mole dropped his folded arms, and passed the back of one great hand in a sort of smearing gesture, awkward yet defiant too, across his forehead, over which his hair lay thick as a mat to his eyebrows.

"We've thought it proper to tell you, sir," he exclaimed, "that the capt'n's a-missing."

"Missing!" I cried; "since when? Do you know?"

The cook came forward, and said in a wheezy voice, striking his chest as though he had taken a chill there, "I was on dooty, 'cording to Capting Broadwater's orders, till midnight; then I thumped him up with a handspike, his instructions being I wasn't to leave the deck on any account till he came. Well, he arrived, and I went forrads and tarned in. At four,

Mole here came to say that the capt'n must have gone below, as nothen was to be seen of him. I says, 'That's odd, ain't it?' I says, 'an' he so pertikler!' Jim here had had the wheel since four bells, and I asked him if he'd seen aught of the capt'n, and he says that at six bells the skipper looked into the binnacle, and then went forrads again out of sight, for it had been as black all night as if a man had gone dark hisself, and arter that I saw no more of him."

"All that's right enough," said the sailor, to whom the cook referred.

"Have you looked for him?" said I quietly, for a sense of deep insincerity in all this business was creeping into me, spite of the cook talking like an honest man on his oath.

"Everywhere saving them there cabins," answered Mole, pointing with his muscular arm, blue with devices, to the after-berths.

"There are but two cabins vacant," said I; "come with me and look for yourself."

I threw open the door of the berth in which were our private stock of provisions, then the door confronting it, and motioning Mole to

precede me, returned to where I had before been standing.

"Of course you have searched his own berth and those near it?" said I.

"First and foremost of all, naturally," responded Mole.

"What is your notion of the matter?" I asked.

Three of them answered together, "He's overboard." Mole added, "Ne'er a doubt of it. It's all hands' opinion. He wasn't a man to hide himself; why should he?" The half-caste Ladova laughed in his throat. "If he's aboard," continued Mole, "we should have found him. We've so overhauled the old hooker that had he been a rat we must have come across him. Ain't that right, lads?"

"Ay, ay," came the reply in a short growl from them all, and the cook in his wheezy voice added, "If he ben't gone to keep poor Billy company my eyes ain't mates."

The suspicion of the insincerity of all this had now grown into a strong conviction that some black deed had been done since I took my last view of Broadwater as he clambered

up the companion-steps. But along with this conviction there came also clear perception that I must not by word or look betray the merest phantom of my thoughts, otherwise I should be held as incriminating as a witness, and dealt with as one, I had no doubt. My secret agitation was already sufficiently great to render the assumption of an air of consternation easy. I looked from one to another and cried, "Though I never liked the captain, men; though I don't mind saying now that he was one of the most tyrannical and ill-mannered shipmasters I ever met or heard of in my life, yet his disappearance is a blow to the lady and myself. The brig is now without a commander, without a mate, without even a bo'sun. How, think you, did Captain Broadwater meet his end? Was it an accident, do you suppose? He could not have *walked* overboard." I shook my head. "My lads," I said solemnly, "I don't doubt but that he committed suicide. He was as a madman all day yesterday—charged me, men, *me*," I cried, striking my breast with a passionate gesture, "with a desire to work up a mutiny aboard! A madman, my lads! a drunken

lunatic! Not a shadow of doubt but he destroyed himself in his watch on deck, urged overboard, maybe, by the recollection of Gordon and the poor lad and your two shipmates—of all four of whom he has gone before his God as surely the murderer as if he had slit the throat of every man of them with his own hand."

"Mates," cried Mole, tossing his head to clear the hair out of his eyes, and sending a fiery glance from one to another of the seamen, "Mr. Musgrave's put it as there's ne'er a man of us could have said it. I've been a seafaring man eighteen years, man and boy, in all sorts of craft, from the likes of this snorter"—he spat upon the deck—"away up to the Atlantic clippers; but of all capt'ns"—he raised his arm with a face that darkened to the sudden fierce restraint he put upon himself; "but he's gone," he added, letting his hand fall; "committed suicide, as you say, sir; a thing most sartin—past all doubting in fact; and here we are, Mr. Musgrave, to find out what's to do."

I could see with half an eye that the impression I had sought to produce was made.

I thrust my hands in a careless sort of way into my breeches-pockets, and fell to pacing the deck. "One thing," I exclaimed, "has followed so fast on top of another, that though there ought to be something staggering in Captain Broadwater's suicide, I find," I said, with a half-laugh and a shrug of the shoulders, "that it scarcely so much as surprises me. But," I continued, addressing Mole, "you ask what's to be done? Have you and your mates a scheme?"

"Well," he answered, speaking with return to his first awkward, defiant manner, "when these men and me, after giving the brig a thorough overhaul, was agreed that the skipper was *gone*, we tarned to and asked one another what was to be done. It didn't need much debating. It's been onderstood all along forrads that you were a sailor yourself equal to navigating a ship, and so of course we at once settled upon asking you to take charge."

I nodded, taking care to preserve a careless manner to guard against exposure of the worry in me that grew more and more consuming as I listened.

"You will take charge, sir?" said Mole, interrogatively.

"Certainly, if you wish it," said I.

He looked round at the others with a faint inclination of his head, and continued, revolving his cap in his hand with his eyes upon it: "Next consideration was, where to go." He looked up at me without seeming to lift his eyelids.

"Where to go!" I cried, startled out of my feigned posture of indifference by the fellow's words. "We're bound to Rio. Shall we not proceed there?"

Every man of them wagged his head with a sort of groaning "No! no! no!" full of an unmistakable note of emphasis.

"We're all resolved not to sail the brig to Rio," said Mole, in an aggressive way that was like a surly hint to me not to argue the point; "we've been turning the matter over, and as we larnt from Mr. Gordon yesterday that our latitude was a few degrees to the norrads of twenty, we've settled to ask you to navigate the Iron Crown to the West Indies."

"The West Indies! You are naming a number of islands which cover a wide area of

ocean," I answered coldly; for it had come to me like an inspiration that, if I valued my own and Miss Grant's safety, I must consent to do these men's bidding without so much as even a falter in the speech in which I assented; that practically the brig was *theirs*, and I and my companion absolutely in their power; and that my sole policy was to appear as though I was willing to be of them, though my approach must exhibit a little natural hesitation. "What part of—what island in the West Indies have you in your mind?"

"Neighbourhood of Cuba," answered one of the men.

"Bill, leave it to me if *you* please," exclaimed Mole, turning upon the speaker with a frown. "Our notion is, sir," he continued, addressing me with a touch of respect in his manner that was not a little welcome, "that you should navigate the brig towards the island of Cuba, and give us notice when we're within a day's sail of it. Mr. Musgrave," he continued, flinging down his cap, extending his left hand and resting the fist of the right one in it, "you've been a sailor yourself—you've seen what we've

suffered—you onderstand the situation we're in —let it, sir, as between seafaring men, be all plain sailing between you and us. There's been murder done aboard this here craft as you know, sir ; and," he proceeded deliberately, almost grinding out the words as he delivered them, " we don't intend that the man as made away with Mr. Bothwell shall be took. We don't want no interference. We don't intend that the Iron Crown shall be boarded. We don't mean to be laid hold of, and charged with mutineering, and punished for it. D'ye see *that*, Mr. Musgrave ? We've got no idea of coming to any sort of harm that we can provide against. What's done's *done !* Nothen's happened but what's been desarved, sir—by God, desarved, mates," he almost roared out, striking his fist violently into the palm of his hand ; then suddenly folding his arms upon his breast, he added, in a changed voice charged with menace, " That's the situation, sir, and we want to know if you'll help us."

" On certain conditions," said I.

" What'll they be ?" he exclaimed, quickly and suspiciously.

I surveyed him a moment whilst I thought, then held up one finger and said, "The lady must have the same privileges of privacy which she has enjoyed down to the present moment."

He took a view of the others, and bringing his eyes slowly to mine said, "The lady'll have no call to be afraid of us, sir. She'll find us sailors and *men*." A grunt of assent from the others followed this.

"Thank you for saying so," said I, "if ever a woman deserved the kindness of a crew she does. Her heart has been with you from the beginning in your troubles."

"Yes, by the Virgin that's true!" cried the half-caste Ladova, fetching the table a blow with his fist.

"As consarns the lady, sir," said Mole, "set your mind at ease. What's your other conditions?"

"I must, with her, have the exclusive use of this cabin."

One of them cried, "You're welcome enough to it. The fok'sle's good enough for poor sailor men."

"It's as Thomas there says," exclaimed

Mole, "the fok'sle's good enough for us. We don't want no cabin. What's your other conditions?"

"I have named them all," I answered. "You'll provide, I suppose, for our comfort here—tell some one of you off to bring our meals along?"

"You'll see to that, cook," said Mole, turning upon him.

"Ay," exclaimed the other, "that'll be all right, sir. The food'll be cooked as afore, and sarved as afore, if it comes to my having to wait on ye myself."

"Men," said I, "I can expect no more, and I am satisfied. You have met me fairly and spoken to me honestly; and whilst you continue faithful to the understanding that now exists between us, you'll find me as staunch as if I had been one of you from the beginning, and the most ill-used of you too. There are two men on deck—you answer for it that they will be satisfied with our arrangement?"

"Yes," answered Mole, "specially may Charles be answered for. A man whose soul

has turned black inside him, as his has, by the shadder o' the gallows, ain't going to be very exacting in his arrangements to get rid of the cuss. Charles will agree, sir ; so will t'other."

"Be it so," said I ; "and now I'll step into the captain's cabin for a sight of his charts and the log-book there, that I may shape a course to Cuba. That's it, I think ?"

"Right, sir," exclaimed Mole. Then looking at the others he said, "Lads, there's nothing I've forgot to say, is there ?"

There was some scratching of heads and shuffling of feet, and then one said, "No, everything's been said, Terry, I think;" and another, "Mr. Musgrave consents to take command, and steer the vessel for Cuba, giving us a day's notice of its heaving into view, and I don't know that there's anything more that we wanted to see him about;" but a third cried, "Ay, but Mr. Musgrave 'll want some one to stand watch and watch with him. Who's to do it ?"

"You're capt'n now, sir," said Mole, rounding upon me, but speaking very civilly; "it's for you to choose one of us to act as your mate.

The crew 'll be satisfied with your choice, no matter who you fix upon."

"Then," said I, "Mr. Mole, I choose you."

The calling him "mister" set the whole of the fellows on the broad grin.

"Very well, sir," said Mole. "Lads, ye can get forrads now. I'll keep a look-out, capt'n, ontil ye come up." Secretly confounded and dismayed as I was by all this business, yet his calling me "captain" made me smile spite of myself, as the others had on my terming him "mister." A general laugh followed, but nothing more was said as the whole body of them went quietly up the ladder and disappeared through the companion-hatch.

I stood a moment or two grasping a stancheon, with a hand to my forehead, oppressed by such a sense of bewilderment that it was as sickening in its way as a bad fit of giddiness. But I rallied swiftly, and observing Miss Grant's door to remain closed, stepped at once to the cabin that had been occupied by Broadwater. I entered it with no small feeling of awe. That he had been foully made away with I did not for an instant doubt, and the

shadow of the crime seemed to lie like a material gloom upon the atmosphere of the plain interior.

I was in the mood, indeed, just then to be shocked and startled by little things, and I am not ashamed to own that I recoiled as though the ghost of the skipper stood before me to the sight that first met my eye on opening the door of a pea-jacket and a sou'-wester on top of it hanging together by the same hook, and under the jacket a pair of breeches arched, empty as they were, to the exact posture Broadwater's shanks exhibited in life. I protest, the suit of clothes, with the thatch of the sou'-wester coming down abaft the coat, looked so astonishingly like the old skipper, that for the instant I thought he had hanged himself with his face to the bulkhead. There was a bunk in the corner with the bedclothes tumbled; over it a short hanging shelf holding a few nautical books; in a corner another table on which were a quadrant-case, a chronometer, a few mathematical instruments, and, very conspicuous, Broadwater's huge silver turnip watch. The soles of a pair of sea-boots, one foot lying

upon another, glimmered out from the gloom under the bunk, as though the captain lay drunk and silent in the darkness there. I took notice, though now I wonder that I should have had eyes for such trifling details, of a likeness of Broadwater and, as I supposed, of his wife facing each other; two heads cut out in black paper, with streaks of bronze to define the lineaments, mounted on a white ground. There was a canvas bag of charts leaning dropsically against the head of the bunk, and in a roll alongside it was a chart of the North Atlantic, which on opening it I found "pricked" down to noon on the preceding day. The mate's log-book was upon the table. The writing in it was Bothwell's down to the time of his murder; a very neat, clean, almost ladylike hand, that threw into grotesque contrast old Broadwater's sprawling, absurdly ill-spelt entries. Gordon, I suppose, poor fellow, had been without literature enough to qualify him to "keep" the book. Having made the necessary calculations to enable me to shape the course the men desired I quitted the berth, grateful to escape an atmosphere in which I breathed with difficulty,

and was passing through my cabin on my way to the deck when I caught sight of Miss Grant looking out through her door. I immediately went to her. There was a resolved, quiet expression in her face, and her voice was without tremor as she said, "I overhead all that passed in the cabin. You do not doubt that the captain has been murdered?"

"I do not," I replied; "but the men must not imagine that we suspect them."

"How will they treat us?"

"Oh, they are well disposed, respectful in their manner to me, and they consented at once to my request that the after part of the vessel should be used only by us. This was more than I had dared hope. You will have heard their demand that I should navigate the vessel to Cuba?"

"Yes," she exclaimed, catching her breath quickly; "it will be a roundabout way to Rio, if ever we get there." She smiled faintly and sighed.

"Never fear, we shall get there," said I cheerfully. "Broadwater has to be thanked for this abominable muddle. I foresaw it all.

I was certain that the men would never suffer this vessel to proceed to her destination, call it Rio or any other place, under a captain whose evidence would hang the man who had freed them from the mate's tyranny. But let us most anxiously bear in mind, Miss Grant, that our policy is not to know that Broadwater has been made away with."

"Oh, I see that clearly," she answered.

"He has committed suicide. Dwell upon this view, and the thought of it will become a habit, and we shall be the safer to that extent. There is plenty of time before us in which to talk over our position and make plans. I will now go on deck and alter the vessel's course. The men must believe me honestly disposed—indeed I must prove myself so; for let them be called murderers—mutineers—the blood that has been shed is assuredly on the heads of Broadwater and Bothwell."

I raised her hand to my lips and went on deck. The morning was as brilliant as any that had ever shone over us. There was a light wind from the north-east which I might have accepted as the first breathings of the

regular trades but for the absence of the familiar clouds which float like signals set in the blue heavens to mark the confines of these gracious and serviceable gales. The whole of the eastern sea stretched in a rippling dazzle as of wrinkled quicksilver, of so fiery an effulgence that the weeping eye went instantly from it to the west for the relief it got from the dark blue water there, and the soothing azure of the sky that sloped down to the soft liquid boundary. I ran a swift glance around the horizon, but there was nothing to be seen. The brig was under the shortened canvas of the preceding night; main-topgallant-sail set, mainsail furled, tack of the trysail hauled up, a jib and the lighter staysails stowed. I found Mole pacing the deck with the conscious looks of a person in authority. Though it was yet early the cook had lighted the fire, and most of the men were gathered about the little caboose, holding pots of hot coffee, some munching at biscuits, others smoking. There was a suggestion of orderliness amongst them that satisfied my eye. It was natural perhaps that, recollecting the ugly stain on the cabin-floor, I should have thrown a

hurried glance over the quarter-deck planking for a like hint that *this* time should concern Broadwater ; but all glistened sand-white to the sun, with no further dyes than the violet pendulous shadows of spar, sail, and rigging. I stepped aft to the binnacle, where Mole at once joined me.

"The course to Cuba," said I, "running a line to the midship bearings of the island, is west by south. Better get your yards braced in and make sail upon the vessel."

He instantly sung out, "Hands to the braces! Square the yards for Cuba, bullies!"

The men drained their pots and sprang to the ropes. Never from the hour of getting the anchor off Deal had they exhibited such hearty nimbleness. Their songs had the true ring, and their notes swept aloft to the hollows of the canvas, and away into the airy blue over the side with the joyous echo of the homeward-bounder's chorus. I motioned the man at the helm to put the wheel over, and the brig slowly floated round with her stern to the sun, and the wide soft heave of the sea coming along under the light wind to the blue shadow of her star-

board quarter on the water. "Steady!" said I; "now hold her at that, my man."

"Cuba 'll be under the bow then at this?" said he, with such a puckering of his face to the grin which overspread it, that it made one think of an old walnut-shell.

"Yes," said I, "in heading as you go we'll be running the island down in good time."

He leaned from the wheel to discharge a quantity of tobacco-juice over the stern. "Well," said he, "better a light pocket than a heavy heart. There'll be no paying off this voyage, I suppose. But, thank the Lard, there's been plenty *o' paying out.*" He uttered Broadwater's name, calling curses upon it in accents by no means whispered, and out of the fulness of his soul fell a-talking to the brig with his eyes on the compass-card that swung sluggishly to the lubber's point.

I stood alone watching the men making sail upon the brig. Mole worked with the others, pulling hard, raising encouraging shouts, and springing here and there with the zeal of a man who considers it his duty to set an example.

Events had come in such a hustling throng that in sober truth I had scarcely yet had time to realize our position. Now as my eye went to the men aloft loosening the sails, and the fellows below bawling out at the sheets and halliards, I could find a moment for reflection. If Broadwater had been murdered, it was hard to imagine, by the hearty, careless behaviour and half-jocose airs of the crew, that they knew of it. Yet if murder had been done it would be sheer idleness to feign that the men could be ignorant of it. There was always the fellow at the wheel to stand looking on as a witness. If Broadwater had made away with himself, the splash of him as he went overboard must have been a distinct sound fit to catch any ear, even above all such surly, weltering noises as were rising out of the blackness last night, from the forecastle head to the binnacle ; unless indeed the old man, with the sleek, secret, wary cunning of the sailor who had gone to his account in the English Channel, had slipped in the darkness into the lee main-chains, and then softly dropped into the sea.

But this was to suppose that he had destroyed

himself, an idea not to be entertained for the space of a breath in the face of the memory of a nature which proved him to have been so grossly of the earth, that one would as soon think of a hog terminating its existence. No! if he were out of the ship, then he was a murdered man; which being past all doubt, I entered into some swift speculations as to the manner of his death; and there being no hint upon the gleaming platform of the deck of the use of the knife, I concluded that he had been stunned and dropped overboard whilst still insensible. One man could have done this. Heavy as the square form of old Broadwater was, one pair of hands might have sufficed to drag the breathless body to the rail, and with vigorous upheaval swing it into a somersault over the bulwarks. Guilt, like terror, will often put a grip of steel into nerveless fingers.

But it was not to be supposed there were no witnesses to this crime. Broadwater was not the man to let the watch on deck skulk even in the blackest hour; therefore there would have been most of the sailors on the move as observers of all that could happen, from the

forecastle to where the quarter-deck began; whilst aft was the helmsman with eyes for the rest of the ship there. Broadwater had been murdered, and all hands knew it! My heart turned sick and cold in me at the bare recollection of what had occurred during our execrable voyage, from the hour of Cooper's suicide to this moment, and I turned with a sense of faintness to the rail, and lay over it a minute or two to recover myself, half-distraught by the conflict of emotions which surged up into my head.

I felt a hand upon my shoulder. I started vehemently to the touch from my bitter mood of apprehension, and confronted Miss Grant.

"There can be no objection to my coming on deck, Mr. Musgrave?" she exclaimed.

"None," I answered; "the men have promised not to trouble either of us. We must trust them—we cannot do otherwise."

She looked at me earnestly. I don't doubt I was worn and haggard enough to account for her concerned, inquiring gaze. She was very pale, but I instantly noticed an expression of decision in her face as of a mind that has

formed a resolution from which nothing is to divert it. Her black eyes looked at me with a full, steadfast shining. It was manifest that the true spirit of this girl, which had been bowed a little as I had last night remarked, had recovered its old natural, erect, heroic posture.

"Let us walk," she said. "It cannot matter that the men should see us together conversing. They must know we do so below when out of sight of them."

"A moment," I exclaimed. "Mr. Mole!" I sung out, "get topmast and topgallant-stunsails aloft. Crowd on all canvas. You want heels, as we do."

"Ay, ay, sir!" He re-echoed my orders promptly. Had he been mate throughout he could not have fitted the post more intelligently, nor exhibited shrewder perception of the dignity of the berth he filled in his manner of calling to the men, that was as good as saying to them, "I'm still your shipmate, lads; but don't forget that I'm *mister* also!"

Miss Grant and I fell to pacing the weather-deck, speaking low, and taking care to slew round for our forward pace whilst the fellow at

the helm was still a little way off. We spoke of the disappearance of Broadwater. She did not doubt with me that he had been murdered, and that the whole of the crew were acquainted with the deed. I said to her, "But glance at them, Miss Grant; see how nimbly they run about; hear the cheeriness in their voices, and the occasional laugh! It is hard to believe they can be conscious that a second dreadful crime was committed in this ship in the dark hours of the morning."

"You will find it was the deed of one man," she answered; "the others feel themselves guiltless, and are happy because they are free. But who is the criminal? Is it Charles, do you think?"

"I *dare* not think," I exclaimed. "As it is, he must regard us as witnesses to his murder of the mate. His dread of Broadwater may be extended to us for the same reason. I am infinitely bothered—infinitely bothered," I exclaimed, with an involuntary clenching of my fist to a fit of exasperation that came to me with the thought of the horrible muddle we were in, and my helplessness and my inability

to perceive the least gleam of light upon the heavy surrounding gloom.

She looked at me with a light smile, and said with a sort of peremptoriness, fascinating for its spirit and kindness, "If *I* can be cool, you must be so. Mr. Musgrave, I really do not feel the least bit afraid; certainly I have no fear for our lives. The hearts in those men are not black; they are not *pirates;* at least they are not pirates yet! They are wretched human creatures, who have been driven to this by ill-treatment, and now that the captain is gone they will stay their hands. Indeed, I have no fear. The future, to be sure, is a gloomy problem, but have not we courage enough between us to wait until it is solved?" She continued to look at me, preserving her light smile.

"We should change places," said I, feeling a trifle of colour in my cheeks; "you have twenty-fold my heart. Yet I should feel less worried, I believe, if I were alone here. It is my duty to see you safely to Rio—I embarked for no other purpose."

"But supposing *I* were alone!" said she.

"Ha!" I exclaimed; "and yet I don't know. I believe your nature would top the whole difficulty as a sea-bird a surge big enough to founder a line-of-battle ship. Indeed the mere circumstance of your being alone might win you more consideration from the sailors than they would show you with a male companion to look after you."

"Well, Mr. Musgrave," said she, and her voice still maintained its character of peremptoriness that rendered it, to my ear at all events, not a little engaging by the quality of half-conscious coquetry that I found in it, "bemoaning our position will not help it. I am certain you will yet discharge the obligation you generously, most generously, undertook; and how Alexander will thank you when he hears of our adventures, and of your heavy anxieties, my heart tells me."

She laid her hand upon her breast as she spoke; the Spanish blood in her indeed was confessed in many of her gestures. And though her accent was entirely English, yet perhaps in her choice of words you missed the ease and simplicity you would expect in a girl

whose blood and lifelong surroundings were purely British. "A plague on Alexander!" thought I. It had come, somehow or other, to my never being able to hear her mention his name without a feeling in me that she was a bit maladroit in referring to it. "A plague on him!" I repeated to myself, spite of the glowing glance she shot at me through the fringes of her white lids, as if to an instant's curiosity as to what was passing in my mind.

"Under Heaven, Miss Grant," I answered, "I hope indeed to be able to discharge my obligation, though 'tis a word that I don't like —indeed, it is quite the other way. But," said I, with a touch of impatience, "this is no time for ceremonies of speech. We are talking of Rio and Alexander; and here, confound it! are we heading away on a crow's course for Cuba."

"Why do the men want to go to Cuba?" she asked.

"I may find out," I answered; "at present I have not the least idea. The West Indies, to be sure, suggest piracy; but *that* dream is gone. If the cross-bones and skull be not hauled

down and stowed away, they are scarce now flying half-mast high. No! yonder livelies will not put this ship to any felonious use! I am to give them notice when we are within a day's sail of the island. That sounds queer—they don't name a port."

"It will all come right, Mr. Musgrave," she exclaimed.

I viewed her with an admiration I could not disguise. It was not only the challenge of her pale, flashful, resolved beauty just then; it was the high courage, giving her faith in the future, that won my eyes to her with an expression in them that must have conveyed more than the message I intended; for her own gaze drooped to it on a sudden, and went away seawards with the merest flutter of a smile upon her lips.

CHAPTER IV.

WE ARE SPOKEN.

PRESENTLY the men had packed studding-sails to the royal yards upon the brig. The increased pressure raised a little yeasty hum at the forefoot. The warm blue gushing of the wind had weight enough in it to steady the canvas. The lower studding-sail overhanging the side by many feet rounded yearningly forwards cloud-like to the pressure; the foot of the main-sail, the weather-clew of which was hauled up, lifted, with scarce a swing-in, to the light heave of the fabric; aloft 'twas all luminous stirlessness, one sail looking to float upwards to another, till on high the little royals blended with the dainty tropical blue till the azure seemed to flow through the whiteness of them, as the pearly chip of new moon in the midday

heavens will seem to be tinctured with the sapphire along which it slides. But I took notice that the crew did not intend to wash the decks down; and that I might satisfy myself on a head or two concerning the ship's discipline, and what was expected of me, I called to Mole, having Miss Grant still at my side. There was little of the cut-throat in the appearance of the seaman as he approached and stood before us, civil, but with a determined manner running through his respectfulness. He was indeed as fine a specimen of an English sailor as one could wish to see; tall, muscular, well-shaped, and with the grace begotten by years of rolling decks in every posture and movement; eyes full of sensibility, a cheek burnt by many months of high suns, and handsome features which seemed the manlier for the shaggy cast his thick, plentiful hair gave them.

"Mr. Mole," said I, "I am captain by the wish and consent of the crew, but have no ambition to venture a step further than they require me to walk. I therefore propose to give no orders until I have ascertained their views. They will work the ship, of course,

brace the yards about to the wind, and make and shorten sail, and the like. And what more ?"

"Nothing more, sir," he answered promptly. So I might have guessed "There'll be no money to take up, Mr. Musgrave," he continued, "and he's a good dog that'll work for a bare bone."

"There'd be money enough to earn though," said I, "should you feel disposed to turn to and make a salvage job of this business. Here's a brig without a commander, with her hold full of mixed commodities——"

He raised his hand with a glance forward. "No, sir. All hands is agreed. If we could stick the blooming hooker up for Lunnon town in a twenty-four hours' ratch, we'd sooner see her chiveying her hell-born skipper and mate that way," pointing down with a wild romantic gesture, "than handle a brace for her salvation." He took a steadier grip of the deck with his feet, so to speak, and looked at me as much as to say, "Hold to your first kind of questions."

"Then," said I, "I am expected to do nothing but navigate the brig ?"

"To Cuba! Yes, sir, *that*, if you please, along with looking after her in dirty weather, for we know from Mr. Gordon that you're sailor enough for most things that can happen at sea."

It would have been idle to dispute this high opinion; the result no doubt of poor Gordon's hope that I might take the mate's place, and of his wish to confirm, by his ardent representations of me as a seaman, such satisfaction as the men might feel had I consented to Broadwater's appointment of me. "The crew will find me as dutiful to their desires, Mr. Mole," said I, "as they are faithful to the promises they made me."

"Mr. Musgrave," he exclaimed, "I'll be plain with ye. There'll be no call for you to take any notice of what goes on. The ship's stores aren't over good, and there's no reason why the cook should not tarn to and sarve up a forecastle mess from time to time out of the cabin provisions. That there live stock," he continued, pointing to a hencoop, "belongs to you and the lady, I believe, sir?" I said "yes." "Well, it won't be touched; but all the rest

we shall take the liberty of claiming for ourselves."

"Of course," I said, "you will do as you please. But what about the liquor?"

"Ye needn't feel consarned about that," he exclaimed, understanding me; "every man's allowance'll be increased, and why not? But there'll be no drinking. If ever you should observe one of the men half so slewed as Broadwater used to be day arter day and night arter night, the crew'll give ye full consent to have him seized up, and their own hands'll do the rest. No, no, there'll be no drinking. The look-out ain't cheerful enough for the likes o' *that* sort of jollification. There's one thing, perhaps," he continued, changing his tone from the high, almost angry, energy in which he had been addressing me, "that is proper I should tell'ee, sir. The crew don't want to have nothen to say to any ships that may chance to pass. They desire to keep themselves to themselves."

A thought coming into my head on his saying this, I looked from Miss Grant to him and said, "If a chance offered for this lady and me

to trans-ship ourselves, you would not object?"

He answered quickly and sternly, "Mr. Musgrave, there must be no meddling with other vessels. Please to understand *that*, sir."

I gave a little involuntary stamp of impatience, but said nothing. Miss Grant's hand stole to my arm with a gentle rebuking pressure of the fingers. The man added, softening his manner, "If you left us, who's to navigate the brig?"

"The ship that received us would lend you a mate."

"Oh, but you *don't* understand," he exclaimed, with a sour lowering of his face. "Well, sir, 'tis settled, of course—there is to be no conversing with anything that may heave in sight."

"I have told you I will do what you ask."

Just then the cook came up to us, to ask if we were ready for breakfast; and simple as the thing was, yet on the top of the shining morning and the quietude of the men, the touch of homeliness in the question put a sort of ease into my mind that was as useful to me just then as a small stroke of good fortune. It half

rose to my lips to gratify Mole by inviting him to use the cabin for his meals, and had I been alone in the brig I should have done so; but the thought of him as society for Miss Grant checked my intention, though I protest he would have furnished her with out and away better company than ever Broadwater was, whilst it was not to be questioned that he had much more to talk about, having served in many different kinds of ships and visited many lands; whereas I believe Broadwater had passed most of his early life in the coasting trade, and never weathered either Cape in all the years he had used the sea.

The cook arrived with our breakfast in due course, and made some show of setting the dishes upon the table, as if he had taken more trouble than usual in the cooking of the meal, and was desirous we should value him for it. We were in the cabin waiting for him when he made his appearance, and after preparing the table he asked me if he should attend upon us. I thanked him for his civility, and added that we should be able to do without him, and told him very plainly that any attention he showed

us now would not be forgotten by me hereafter. I shall always remember this man for the peculiar dingy pallor of his face, so much like the complexion of the "duff" he cooked for the sailors that no painter could have copied it more inimitably; also for his large, moist eyeballs, whose protrusion gave him a stupid, staring look, whilst at the same time the sky-blue pupils were so bleared with damp and the cloudiness of congestion as to make his wide-open gaze a sort of blind hunt in the direction of what he looked at. Though I had told him we could do without him, he still lingered, as though the novelty of being in the cabin pleased him. I thought I would ask him a question or two.

"Didn't it strike you as odd, cook, that Captain Broadwater should have chosen you to stand watch and watch with him?"

"Why, yes," said he, in his slow, wheezy voice. "I don't know what there was to make him partial to me in that way. He was no more beloved by me than he was by the others. He had such a choice of foul words as never I heard in a man's mouth afore. 'Sides a trick of

hazing just proper to break the heart of a cart-horse. Perhaps his feelings made his way towards me through his stomach. He was much in love with that end of him, sir, and yet coarse as a Fin in his eatin' too. He was born in the latitood o' roast pork. Had he been given birth to higher north he'd ha' asked in his prayers for nothen better than slush."

"He must have destroyed himself very cunningly last night, or rather this morning," said I. "No doubt he sneaked overboard into the blackness of the lee-channels, and thence dropped." I glanced at him carelessly as I said this.

"Can't tell ye how it happened, I'm sure," he answered. "I was tarned in at the time, as you know. Hope that there bacon's broiled to your liking, miss?"

Miss Grant thanked him with a smile and a bow.

"Were you ever at Cuba, cook?" said I, in an offhand way.

"No, sir," he answered, making a step towards the companion-ladder, as though he considered it time to be gone, and then stopping to answer me.

"Havanna's the chief port," I continued. "There should be no difficulty, I suppose, in meeting with a ship bound straight on for Rio. We're both," said I, smiling and preserving my careless manner, "in a bit of a hurry, and I heartily wish that the crew had selected waters nearer the South American seaboard than the Caribbean Sea."

"We're bound to Cuba, anyhow," said he, with another stride towards the steps.

"Do you know what part of Cuba the men design to touch at?" I asked; but as I said this I felt Miss Grant's hand upon my knee. I looked at her, and marked a lightning-like lifting of her long lashes to the skylight, where, partly through the glass and partly through the raised sash, I caught a sight of the figure of Mole standing in an unmistakably listening posture, though you would have said his attention was fixed by something that was happening forward. "No further need to detain you, cook," I exclaimed, loudly and cheerfully; "if you can persuade the crew—for your influence, you know, as 'doctor' ought to be considerable—to let me navigate the brig to any point

nearer to Rio than Cuba, you will be doing not me but this lady a prodigious service."

The figure at the skylight moved away. He probably guessed by the change of my voice that I knew he was listening. The cook exclaimed, "The destination of this here wessel is a matter as consarns all hands. It's not for any one man more 'n another to interfere. Cuba's been settled upon, and I allow that the arrangement had best be left alone." With that he went on deck.

"I think you are a little indiscreet," said Miss Grant softly.

"Perhaps so," I replied, "but the fellow with his pale face and projecting eyes had, I thought, an honest look, and I seemed to find a suggestion of garrulity lying behind his loitering here. But I am mistaken. I must be cautious, as you say ; still it is distracting not to be able to make even a *guess* at the intentions of the fellows."

"You must expect to be watched," she continued. "We shall have to be exceedingly cautious in conversing, and, Mr. Musgrave, it will not do for you to question any of the men.

You must be as reserved as they are, attend to the navigation of the ship according to their requirements, satisfy them with your honesty as a navigator by such proofs as their ignorance will suffer them to understand, and leave the rest to time and to chance. It *must* be so!" she cried, still softly, yet with impetuosity in the drawing of her breath. "It is for time and chance to decide all things. Let one's condition be that of a princess, or as dark and as full of care as ours now, it is the same."

"You shall control me as you desire," said I, gently; "you have more wit than I, more patience, more courage, and will preserve me from doing anything that I may repent for your sake. I feel myself to a certain extent responsible for the dreadful position in which we are placed." She motioned dissent with her hand.

"Well," I continued, "first of all, I ought to have know human nature too well to have been duped by a man like Broadwater."

"Oh, Mr. Musgrave, we do not know human nature even when we are white-haired," she cried, "and you are so young yet!"

"That is so," said I, stealing a look at her to see if there was any correspondence between her eyes and her words. "But I am not so young as not to have known better than to suffer ourselves to proceed on this voyage, when perhaps, by insisting upon it, I could have got Broadwater to set us ashore in the English Channel. One hope I have, however," with a further lowering of my voice; "it may not have occurred to the men. We have ships of war in the West Indian waters, and it is impossible to conjecture what might come of some smart sloop heaving us into view, and desiring a closer acquaintance from symptoms which the astute naval eye can often discern in what to another is mere timber, canvas, and an ugly head or two peeping over the rail."

But the idea of a cruiser overhauling us was a vague hope at best. I might think to lighten Miss Grant's anxiety, and steal a little ease for myself too, out of the fancies that came into my head by talking of such things. But as the nations were then at peace, as piracy was pretty nearly extinct, and as there was nothing to suggest the slaver in the aspect of the Iron Crown,

what excuse should a naval officer find in the mere cut of canvas, and trim of yards, and run of rail, whether ornamented or not with an ugly head or two, to send a boat aboard for a look at the brig's papers ? The island of Cuba bore about two thousand miles distant from us. How many days' sailing that might signify no man would have cared to conjecture. We might indeed look for the trades anon, and blow along briskly to the quartering gale, without need for days at a stretch perhaps to check a brace or stand by a halliard. But the sun eats out the heart of a steady blowing as the Antilles are approached, and the sweeping wind that has been whitening the curl of the dark blue chasing billows, and putting a windy sparkle into the glitter of the foaming huddle of gem-crested waters flashing from under the counter in a long race towards the leaping sea-line, dies out into parched catspaws, brief bursts of fiery squall, and long intervals of glassy, rotting calm, with nothing to tarnish the surface of the blinding mirror but the jump of the skipjack, or the thin blue line that denotes the wake of the wet black fin of the shark.

But at sea what happens for the day must suffice for it, and the breeze had now settled into so fixed and pleasant a humming, that I was scarce surprised when returning on deck after breakfast to find a hint in the blue shadowiness in the north-east, with here and there a head of cloud lifting out of it, of the presence or the approach of the regular trade-wind. All hands were on deck forward saving Mole, who was aft, and Charles at the wheel. They were lying sprawling, sitting about, smoking to a man, yarning, with often a loud laugh breaking from one or another of them. Indeed, it was more like a dog-watch scene on a fine summer's night than such a picture as one would look for in the work-up, hard-going hours of the forenoon watch. Over the side the seas ran short, and broke friskily. Again and again, from either bow, a score of flying-fish would dart from the arch of wave there as though some young sea-god leaning against the shearing forefoot was showering barbs of mother-of-pearl up through the blue translucency into the sunny air.

It was my watch on deck, and Mole on

my arrival was going forward, when I stopped him.

"Is there a man aboard this vessel," said I, "who has any knowledge of navigation?"

"Not going to such lengths," he answered, "as taking the height of the sun and discovering our situation by celestial observations. But I don't doubt, if I was put to it, that I should be able to find my way about with the log-line, supposing my departure's correct."

"Then," said I, "I may judge, even from what you say, that you are able to follow my navigation, and to form an opinion of its correctness by looking at the course I mark down on the chart."

"Yes, sir, I should be able to do that."

"I am glad to hear it. I desire that my goodwill should be appreciated. The men would not doubt my sincerity or my capacity with you at hand to tell them that you have checked my reckonings, and that I am heading true to their wishes."

"We're all quite satisfied, sir," he responded, with a falcon glance at me under the careless droop of his lids. "We have no fear

of your deceiving of us;" and with a half-flourish of his hand to his head he went towards the forecastle, leaving me under the impression that I had said too much, and that it would be as well for me in future to rehearse whatever I might wish to say to the men with Miss Grant before expressing myself.

As I walked the deck alone, I would catch now and again an odd, inquiring sort of look from Charles, who grasped the wheel. It was almost wistful in its way, and with the idea of giving him a chance to interpret it, I came presently to a stand at the quarter, sending a light glance astern, and then made a stride to the binnacle from which I peered to the canvas aloft, as though to remark with what steadiness the craft swung through it under the dead weather drag of the great studding-sail. My aversion from the fellow was not without a weak element of pity too for him. I seemed to remember now, oddly enough, as I held him within the sphere of my sight without regarding him, the kind of light that had come into his face like a smile when, as he tugged at his oar in the boat that carried us aboard in the Downs,

he had let his eyes rest on Miss Grant, before sending them on to old Broadwater who sat abaft her.

"Sir," he suddenly exclaimed. I turned with an air of surprise at being accosted by him. "It's known to you and the lady, sir, that I killed the mate. He drove me wild in the dark, as I stood here, with more outrageous language than the captain himself could use. He rose the devil in me, and I drew my knife —though the moment after I could have stabbed myself for doing of it." He dragged over a spoke with a mechanical twist; his olive-coloured complexion had perished into a sickly, sallow green which his dark eyes, gleaming with the contending passions in him, so accentuated that the memory of his visage was for long one of the ugliest phantoms that troubled my slumbers. I drew a pace away when he spoke of killing the mate; he continued talking hurriedly, as though he feared I should leave him before he had had his say. "You and the lady, sir, thinks of me as a bloody murderer, and so I am—so I am! But it began and ended in what you know and saw. So

help me all the good angels I was taught to pray to when I was a child, and so help me the blessed Virgin herself"—he let go the wheel with one of his little hands to make the sign of the cross upon his breast—"whatsoever may have been the cause of the capt'n's disappearance, I am innocent of it. Do you believe me, sir?"

I looked at him a moment and said, "I do. But do you mean to suggest that he met his end by foul play?"

He made a passionate gesture and cried, "I know nothing about it, sir. I want you to believe *that*, and I want the lady to believe it more'n you. She had pity for me when I—when I—" He paused with a gasp and a swift pointing towards the foremast with a trembling hand.

She came on deck at that moment.

"I am glad to learn what you have told me," said I, and I added coldly, for aversion was strong in me again, and besides, his very words were as good as owning that the captain had been murdered, though not by him, "No doubt the unhappy man fell crazy with drink and

temper, and through the loss of the boat, along with his conscience over the drowning of the cabin-boy, and quietly sneaked overboard ;" and so saying I walked over to Miss Grant,

I called to some men to spread the little scrap of awning the brig carried, and three or four of them came instantly tumbling aft as willingly as one could wish. I then placed a chair for Miss Grant to windward, where I could sometimes halt in my walk to have a chat with her, for now that I had charge of the deck, her accompanying me in my pacings would scarcely look ship-shape in the eyes of the seamen. But I made no reference to my conversation with the half-blood, beyond merely telling her in a half-whisper that the fellow had, in an odd way, protested himself as innocent of whatever the cause might have been of Broadwater's disappearance ; whence I thought it was certainly to be gathered that the old man had been made away with. However, it was not a little comforting, I can tell you, to feel that this Charles, whom I held in secret dread, was equal to feeling grateful to Miss Grant for the concern and indignation his punishment at the foremast

had excited in her. It was gratifying to me, moreover, to know that he had conscience enough left in him to shrink from suspicion of another dark deed. Indeed my talk with the fellow, followed on by the lively willingness of the men who responded to my order to lay aft and spread the awning, would have put, I believe, something of lightness into my tread of the quarter-deck, specially with the radiant scene of heaven and ocean to turn from to Miss Aurelia's dark eyes, which often followed me as I walked, but for the dull, oppressive wonder as to what project the crew had in mind in making me head for Cuba, a thing that gnawed in the secret recesses of my mind like some sulky throbbing ache of a nerve.

Before my watch was out however there happened an incident which gave me to know very plainly that the sailors' resolution was fixed in one direction, at all events. The breeze had freshened—it was a little before ten o'clock in the morning—clouds rounded and of silken texture, like growing puffs of powder-smoke from great ordnance fired below the horizon, were sailing up into the blue hollow which the

sunshine so filled that it was all azure dazzle over our mastheads; the brig was sliding along at some five knots, cradling her form from one dark blue brow to another, with the whipped waters merrily sparkling into billows and melting into cream all along her as she ran. Suddenly a man, who was standing on the forecastle head, bawled out, "Sail ho!" to which cry I noticed that the others, who lounged or lay sprawling about the deck near the galley, immediately started to their feet and ran to the rail to look.

"Where away?" I sang out.

"Broad on the weather-bow," came back the answer.

I looked, and at once descried a sail leaning like a white shaft in the quarter the man had indicated, and, as I might judge by the heel of her, by which one saw that she must be hugging the wind, heading directly for us. I went to the companion for the glass, and bringing the tubes to bear, made the stranger out to be a small brigantine. The hands forward over the rail watched her steadfastly. I waited and had another look at her, and found her growing

rapidly. Indeed, that was to be expected, for our united pace would probably be closing us at the rate of some ten or twelve knots in the hour. I hailed the forecastle, and desired that Mr. Mole should be roused up and sent aft to me. He sprang through the hatch within a minute after he had been called, blinking with sleep and the darkness in his eyes against the splendour on deck, but laying aft nevertheless as briskly as if he had the scent of danger in his nostrils.

"What's the matter now, sir?" he cried out, as he approached.

"I simply want to be advised," said I; and pointing to the little brigantine that was coming along with her wash-streak down in the smother, and the weather-leeches of her topsail and top-gallant-sail and royal shivering like the fly of a flag in a breeze to the grip of the helmsman's luff, I said, "You see that fellow out there?"

He shaded his eyes and answered, "Plain enough, sir."

"Take that glass," I exclaimed, "and look at her, and tell me what you observe."

He worked away with the telescope, and

then suddenly exclaimed, "'Tain't English colours, is it? No, it's Norwegian—Jack down—flying half-masted."

"Exactly," said I; "it is a distress-signal, and she wants to speak us. Now, I don't mean to accept any responsibility in a business of this kind. There may be people yonder perishing from some want which it is in our power to supply——"

"Can't help it if there are, sir," he cried vehemently. "We're bound to shove on; there's nothen that must stop us!" and a dark look came into his face, as though he supposed I was going to argue, and was angry by anticipation.

"Be it so," I exclaimed. "We'll keep straight on, as you say." He sent a look full of significance at the man who had relieved Charles at the wheel, and then went forward and leant upon the rail alongside the others, staring his hardest, as they were, at the approaching vessel.

What they had suspected in her appearance I don't know, but I gathered he had told them of the distress-signal and of the nationality of it

—scarce yet visible to the naked eye—by the lapsing of most of them from their intent, strained, eager posture into a half-lounging, careless attitude. I waited a little, and then viewing her again through the glass, I was not a little surprised to remark that she appeared to be full of people. I examined her carefully, and was sure I could not be mistaken. If the swarm of glimmering dots along the whole length of her rail were not human faces, it would puzzle a man to guess what else they could be. Presently the men noticed this too, for I saw some of them give their breeches an uneasy hitch as they brought their eyes away from her to our own canvas with sharp starings aft, as though they feared I might play them some ugly trick if I were not closely watched. The size of the brigantine scarcely exceeded a hundred and fifty tons, and I never remember seeing a prettier model. She had a true piratical sheer forwards, a run of bow into a knife-like cutwater, sheathing green with usage, that flickered with a sort of emerald sheen to the light of the snow that boiled about her forefoot as she rose to the fine-weather surge.

The swells of her well-cut canvas leaned to us sunwards with milk-white softness in the shine of them; nothing afloat could look more saucy, taut, and seaworthy, and one almost suspected some sinister device in the dumb appeal of the speck of crimson bunting with its blue cross, white margined, and inverted Jack, only that the crowd of heads, now distinctly visible, made such a puzzlement of the sight as effectually checked speculation. I watched her intently through the glass, and noticed much motioning of arms, and brandishing of caps and other headgear amongst her people. It needed no specially clear eye for human distress to interpret those gesticulations into an earnest entreaty to us to boom-end our studding-sails and bring the brig to the wind. I stood at the rail watching her, and Miss Grant came to my side.

"There are women aboard, and children too," I cried; "at least a hundred people, I should say. They will think us demons for not attending to their signal."

"What do you imagine they need?" she inquired.

"They may have run short of provisions, or worse still, of water," I answered, steadfastly examining the length of her black sides for any bright spout from the scuppers that might tell me her pumps were going.

The men along the line of bulwarks watched her with faces as hard as figure-heads, with here and there a jaw moving upon the quid that stood high in the cheek-bone, whilst at intervals a fellow would drop from his akimbo arms upon the rail to light his pipe at the galley fire, returning promptly however and resuming his place, where he would stand quietly with a wooden-headed look, but nevertheless with sooty pipe in mouth, blowing out clouds that told of some inward perturbation. On a sudden the brigantine put her helm up, slackened away her sheets fore and aft along with the lee-braces, and headed direct for us. Her manœuvre startled me, for I thought she meant to run us aboard. The clipper hull of her, now that she was making a free wind of it, swept like the shadow of a cloud over the water. She piled the foam to her hawse-pipes, and a yeasty hillock went along with

her on either quarter, with the flash past it of her wake, whose giddy dazzle would have made a near eye reel again. Mole sprang aft to the quarter-deck in a few bounds.

"What's she up to, Mr. Musgrave?" he shouted. "Does she mean to board us, think ye?"

"No, no; to speak us, man—to speak us," I answered, for already her intention was made manifest to me by a subtle shifting of her helm, that would enable her presently to range within speaking distance of us, heading as we were. In another ten minutes she was within a biscuit toss, almost directly abreast to windward, but they had to let go their royal and top-gallant-halliards and *scandalize* their mainsail, as it is termed, to keep their position; for though the brig was under every stitch of canvas that would draw, with studding-sails swelling cloud-like one on top of another far beyond her weather-side, the clipper to windward with all her canvas abroad would have forged ahead like a steamer, and been out of hail in five minutes. There were twenty or thirty women amongst the crowd, some of them with babies in their arms, and forty or fifty men, and at

least a score of children. The vessel, being small and somewhat deep in the water, showed her decks to us with every floating slide to leeward. The picture, for strangeness, wildness, and I may add for beauty, was in its way incomparable. The flash of the low black hull through the milk-white boiling along her bends, the ivory gleam of her canvas melting into soft shadowing beyond the central curves of the cloths, the crowd upon her decks so variously and oddly apparelled that nothing short of the paint-brush would put the scene before you—red and green handkerchiefs round the head, caps like inverted flower-pots falling with a tassel to the shoulders, coats of frieze with great metal buttons, yellow half-boots, red petticoats, the gleam of gold or silver earrings—such a huddle of bright colours defies the pen; one thought of an opera troupe, with its choruses and orchestra to boot, as having taken ship for a pleasure cruise, and fallen into some dreadful condition of incommunicable distress. The Norwegian flag, as I have said, flew Jack down half-masted from the main-topmast head; but though she might have been a Norwegian ship,

with a Norwegian crew in her, I cannot persuade myself that the women, the children, and most of the men were of that nation. Yet it was impossible to understand a word of what they said. Perhaps they would have been as unintelligible had they yelled in English, for every throat in the craft was strained at the same moment, and the wind brought the hubbub along to fall in a blind dead way upon the ear like a fog upon the eye.

A man, presumably the skipper, an old patriarchal-looking fellow, with a long white goat-like beard, and a white fur cap as it seemed coming close down to his shaggy eyebrows, got into the main-rigging, with a speaking-trumpet in one hand, through which he roared a sentence that was as Hebrew, afterwards pointing with his trumpet to his flag. I said to Mole, "Shall we hail them?"

He answered with a stamp of his foot, "No, by——, not if they was on fire. What do the dogs mean by sticking their craft alongside of us?"

Besides continuously shouting, the queer kaleidoscopic crowd convulsed themselves with

every imaginable kind of gesture. Some pointed into their wide-open mouths: others clasped their hands upon their stomachs, with grimaces inimitably expressive of suffering; many motioned as if in the act of drinking; one man held a bottle aloft upside down, tapping it with his finger, and shaking his head most dolefully. There was indeed no need for them to tell in words what was the matter with them.

I cried, "Mr. Mole, you see how it is; those people want water—*water!*" I repeated, emphasizing the words, for if there's a human need that thrills to the heart of the sailor on the high seas, it is *that*. "It is in our power to relieve them to a small extent at least. Look at those children! No possible harm can come, man, from our allowing them to send a boat to us."

He turned upon me savagely. "Mr. Musgrave," he exclaimed, in a voice like a snarl, so hard did his passion make it for him to speak," "if ye have an atom of consarn in *your* safety—in the lady's safety—you'll hold your *jaw*."

I took Miss Grant's hand, and walked with her right aft, and seated myself by her side on the grating.

"You must let them have their way," she exclaimed; "they are devils, not men."

I was too sick at heart, too enraged by the man's insolence, too shocked by the picture of the gaping crowd to windward, to be able to answer her.

Presently there fell a silence upon the little brigantine, and you heard nothing but the seething of the water past her as her sharp stem sheared through it with a hissing as of red-hot iron. The hush was broken by the old white-bearded man bellowing again to us through his speaking-trumpet. Mole, with folded arms, stood looking on without a stir in the scowl of his face. Not a voice disturbed the stillness forward, where the men hanging over the rail were gazing with an air of mere idle curiosity. Twice the old man hailed us; he then got out of the rigging, and on reaching the deck flung his trumpet down with a furious gesture, sank upon his knees, and lifting up his hands to God, seemed to invoke a

curse upon us, varying his dreadful tragic posture of denunciation by pointing at our brig with his eyes upturned. At the sight of this the rest of the people fell to menacing us with brandished fists, shouting and yelling at us till their voices blended into one long howl of execration. Yet had our crew been statues they could not have surveyed the dreadful scene more impassively. Presently the old man rose from his knees, and motioned to the fellow at the wheel to put it over; the topgallant and royal yards were hoisted afresh, the peak-halliards manned, and in a few moments the swift and beautiful little vessel was hauling away from us, buzzing round to the brilliant breeze with a wake following her white as the shining of the sun on the polished surface of a scythe.

I thought by her ranging to starboard that she meant to round into the wind, and so get her port-tacks aboard for the ratch that she was upon when first sighted. Instead, when she had stood away far enough to come round to the wind under her starboard helm without chance of striking us, over went her wheel;

she spun on her heel like some saucy, frisky woman in a waltz, and flattening in and bracing up fore and aft, sweep! she came for us again, passing close under our quarter, from no other motive that I could see than to furnish her people with another opportunity of uniting their voices in a long, raging and shrieking curse upon us. Then like an arrow she was away astern crossing our wake; but whilst it was possible for the naked eye to hold her, one saw, as it were, the throbbing of the crowd along her as they shook their maledictions at us with flourished arms and fists.

When she had fairly settled away into toy-like dimensions, Mole, who had been watching her from his position near the main-rigging, came up to me, and said with the civil air of his former behaviour, "Sorry to have lost my temper, sir; but you know that all hands is resolved not to speak anything, from a scow to a line-of-battle ship. That's our resolution, and it 'ud make things easier if you was to be so good as to keep as clear an eye upon it as you're fixing upon the course to Cuba."

Miss Grant said quickly, as though fearing

an indiscretion of temper in me, she wished to interfere between myself and the man, "Hunger and thirst are dreadful things, Mr. Mole. Those people made their necessities very plain to us. It was the sight of the women and children that moved Mr. Musgrave."

"That's right enough, miss," he answered; "but who's to know what ailed them? Supposing it to have been thirst, what amount of fresh water calculated to be of any use to such a army of folks have we got to spare out of our stock? There's all the way to Cuba before us, with the sun pretty nigh overhead every day, and we've got a right to think of ourselves first, I allow. 'Sides," he continued, putting the sharp of his hand to his forehead to gaze at the now distant sail, and frowning to the brassy glare that came in folds from the running waters off each head of sea, "who's going to 'leviate people there's no onderstanding? Human they was, I dessay; but the likes of such a lump on a little vessel's deck, swearing, motioning, patting their guts, making pretend to drink, and then apparently falling down and cussing of us, ain't altogether the sort of stroke you'd

look for in natural things, 'specially when the whole biling is rigged up as if a body of organ-grinders had turned pirates—stole some blooming Dutchman's vessel, and then missed their road."

He talked as if he wished me to find something humorous in his fancies. Bitterly indignant and resentful as I secretly felt, I was not such a fool as to despise an attitude of conciliation in the one man in whom I had now had time to observe the others had confidence, who indeed headed, and no doubt influenced, the crew; so I returned him a few civil, commonplace words, after which he went forward, where he stood talking a while.

CHAPTER V.

A FESTIVE DOG-WATCH.

At sea so much which is strange happens, that no man who has any knowledge of the life will trouble himself to hunt about for solutions. I remember a sailor once telling me, that his ship being blown to the westwards off the Chilian coast, deep in the heart of the Pacific waters, they fell in with a Chinese junk, with three men and a couple of women on board. The wonder of this junk lay not in her sides gray with barnacles and green with weeds, nor in the queer, weather-befouled aspect of her faded Asiatic sails, nor in the ragged look of the blue-gowned, betailed, mustard-coloured creatures that were on deck; but in her being where she was. How came she in the South Pacific? It was like the fly in the

amber. The Chinamen made passionate efforts to represent their condition, but to no purpose. Not a motion of a hand of theirs was interpretable, and the captain of the ship growing wearied, filled on his vessel and proceeded on his course.

There are confrontments, I say, in the sea-life, which, being unintelligible on the face of them, no man who has his reason will attempt to explain. It was as likely as not that the brigantine was a Norwegian that had fallen in with an emigrant vessel in distress, had taken off all or most of the people, and then run short of provisions and water. But there was so much to keep me thoughtful in other ways, that, though tragically strange as it was, it was not an incident to constrain my attention to it as though all had been well with us, and the thing no more than a brief break in the monotony of a sunny voyage. The reflection that grew out of it was—what sort of treatment were Miss Grant and I to expect from men in whom selfish fear could so work as to render them insensible to the most piteous of all the demands which the

stern usage of the sea can force from human distress? It was the same selfish fear that kept them quiet. One might guess there would be no mad broaching of rum-puncheons with them. They were too much alarmed with their situation to risk anything for the want of unclouded brains. Indeed, their sobriety was as good as a hint of their distrust of me. They very well knew that my one consuming desire must be to escape with Miss Grant from the brig; also that I was sailor enough to perceive there was no chance for me in that way outside the speaking of a ship that would be willing to take us off. They treated me with a sort of negative civility indeed; that is to say, they kept away from our end of the brig, and jumped to my orders; but then my knowledge of navigation rendered me so important to them that they could not do without me; though what haunted my mind as I stood with Miss Grant, watching the dim flicker of the brigantine's canvas on the edge of the wide blue sweep of sea, was, that a day must presently come when the high land of Cuba would be heaving

into view, and what then would happen? There was something, too, inexpressibly malignant to my fancy in the request of the men that I should let them know when we were within a day's sail of the island; and the mere inability to gauge the meaning of this desire was enough to keep every instinct in me writhing in a torment of uncertainty.

It was noon however, and I went below for Broadwater's quadrant. It was a primitive appliance, and likely as not to be inaccurate. However, I made eight bells with it, watched closely by the men as I screwed away at the sun, and then returned to the cabin to work out the sights. I used Broadwater's room, as the conveniences I required were in it, and whilst I sat at the little table Miss Grant arrived and stood behind me, looking over my shoulder as I jotted down the figures. She was anxious to know where we were. I unrolled the chart, and pointed to our position.

"It is still a long way to Cuba," she exclaimed, bending her stately figure over the chart. Her mouth was as firm, her face as

composed, her gaze as steadfast, soft, and serene as though she were viewing some picture in a book.

"Yes," I groaned, "a weary long way."

She seated herself on a little locker at the foot of old Broadwater's bunk. Her beauty was like a light upon the atmosphere of the quaint, somewhat darksome interior. You would have needed to peep in at the door to appreciate the curiosity of contrast wrought by her warm and glowing presence, the glimmer of amber light in threads of her hair, as though the brown of it were self-luminous, the unconscious graceful dignity of her attitude, and by the odd, rough furniture of the cabin; the suit of clothes with the tarpaulin hat on top, swinging like the figure of Broadwater himself at the bulkhead; the soles of the jack-boots sprawling in the shadow under the bunk, with *her* little feet a yard away from them; the rough time-bronzed pilot-coat, hanging behind her as a canvas, so to speak, for the perfections of her clear skin and the flash of her dark eyes to show on.

She leaned towards me, folding her hands over her knee, and said, "Will it be possible to escape from this brig?"

I started and exclaimed, "I have been full of that fancy since the brigantine hauled off. No; I do not think it is possible. We must take such luck as we may find here."

"I want you to understand, Mr. Musgrave," said she, "that if any scheme of escape should occur to you, you will find me equal to it. I shall not mind what I do, indeed. I will dress up as a man—I will row an oar—yes! I can row. I am not afraid of firing pistols. Alexander will tell you I am a good shot."

"She looked down into her lap with a faint smile, then her eyes met mine again—a full gaze, brilliant with inquiry.

"Well," said I, "I had not been in your company ten minutes before I guessed that you would be the proper sort of girl for a pinch. I was right, and so you see, spite of my being so *young*, I am capable of taking a correct view sometimes of human nature."

She laughed softly, and with a foreign gesture of her hand said, "You are too impetuous, too emotional. One would hardly think you an Englishman, you abandon yourself so readily to impressions."

"It may be as you say," said I, feeling somehow almost as much confused by her manner and by her beauty as on the day when she had first stood before me in the parlour of the London lodging-house; "but this anxiety is new in you. What makes you talk of escaping from the brig?"

"Simply—as I have said, Mr. Musgrave—that if you have any scheme I am willing to bear as good a part in it as if I were a man." She drew herself erect, as though she would suggest physical as well as intellectual strength.

"I have no scheme," said I; "would to God I could see my way to one!"

"Might we not lower the boat that hangs at the vessel's side?"

I shook my head quickly. "No," said I, "there is always the fellow at the wheel. How should we be able to lower a boat,

even on the blackest night, unperceived by him?"

"But could you not gag him?" said she. "I could help you to pinion him, and then stand over him pistol in hand," smiling, yet with a world of resolution in her gaze, "whilst you let the boat sink to the water."

I went to the door and peeped out to make sure that nobody was listening.

"Supposing," said I, approaching her close that she might hear my voice, which was scarce more than a whisper, "we should succeed in getting away in the boat, what would be our fate in a little open ark in the middle of the great Atlantic, exposed all day to the broiling sun, and all night to the heavy dews, to say nothing of squalls, thunder-storms, gales, putrefying calms, and the rest of the conditions of the glorious ocean life? No, no! dismiss *that* from your mind—for your own sake, Miss Grant—my cousin would shoot me for subjecting you to such risks and privations. But," I continued anxiously, for I thought I might find a hint in her woman's cleverness, "this thought is new in

you. Why do you wish to escape from the brig? A bitter strong wish it must be when, to gratify it, you are willing to face the hazard of an open boat."

"Oh, Mr. Musgrave, I am shocked by the inhumanity of the crew. I had believed them plain sailors forced into evil by bad treatment, but whose better natures would appear again when the tyranny they suffered from had ceased. I think so no longer. I fear their intentions towards us may be—may be—I am frightened by the vagueness of their directions to you. They speak of Cuba, but they name no part of it."

"Hush!" I cried, hearing a footstep. Mole put his head in at the door, knocking with his great knuckles on the bulkhead as he did so.

"Beg pardon," said he; "I thought I'd just come along and see how the land lies with us to-day."

There was insolence in this intrusion, but then I had to consider it was my own bringing about. He stood in the doorway, peering in, in a posture civil enough, cap in hand, filling the frame of the door with his great figure.

"Here," said I, putting my finger upon the chart, "is the brig's position to day at noon."

He came to the table and peered close.

"The vessel's heading west by south," said he, after a pause; "this here map don't show the West Indies."

"No," said I, "it is the North Atlantic only; but there should be a track-chart in that bag to give you all the bearings you want."

There were nearly a dozen charts rolled up in the bag. I pulled out four, and on opening the fifth found it to be what I needed—a track-chart of the world. This I spread before Mole, and left him to find out for himself whither a west by south course would carry us from the point of latitude and longitude I penciled upon the chart. It is an old saying, and a terribly trite one too, that a man must go afloat to see the wonders of the Lord; and 'tis equally true, that a man who is a lover of strange, odd, surprising pictures, will find them nowhere in greater perfection than at sea. When I recall that little cabin, with the dim blue light sifting through the glass of the closed scuttle—the

muscular, swaying figure of the sun-darkened seaman stooping over the chart, his great hairy paws flat upon the table, his hair hanging from his brow like a fall of rain from the edge of a cloud—Miss Grant sitting silent and watchful, her white fingers clasped upon her knee, with the flash of a gem there that seemed to be reflected in every slight movement of her dark eyes—myself subduing the worry and anger within me to the best careless demeanour that I could contrive by leaning my cheek upon my hand, softly whistling some light sea-tune, to which I kept time by an easy striking of the table with the pencil I held—Broadwater's clothes swinging with the swaying of the ship from pegs in the bulkhead, with other rude, homely details of ocean furniture, already described, to fill, as it were, the spaces between the human interests of that interior with novel colour and touches remote from all shore-going experience;—I say, when I recall this picture, I ask myself, Where's the like of such a scene to be encountered save on that liquid surface, whose cradling respirations deepened yet the strangeness of the whole by communicating

those vitalizing elements of sound and motion incommunicable by the pen?

Mole stood erect presently, and looked for his cap.

"Well, I hope the course I am shaping satisfies you?" said I.

"It'll work out as true as a hair, it seems to me," he answered.

"To what part of Cuba are we sailing, Mr. Mole?" inquired Miss Grant, in her most natural manner, without any attempt at an artless voice or a face of innocent wonderment.

"We ain't decided yet," he answered promptly, picking up his cap and going to the door. "We mean to keep Charles clear of the gallows if we can. Cuba's a good bit off yet, and when Mr. Musgrave lets us know that it's within a day's sail, we may have to tarn to and discuss what's to be done, onless we've come to an agreement beforehand."

He gave a nod towards the state-cabin, and turning upon us again, said, "The cook's asked me to say your dinner's ready, sir." He then went on deck.

We found a very tolerable meal prepared for

us. The cook, having put the dishes upon the table, left us to ourselves ; and as we sat close together we were able to talk freely without fear of our subdued voices penetrating to any attentive ear that might be lurking at the sky-light. I told Miss Grant it would need very little consideration to assure us both that, if we valued our lives, we must make no effort to escape by the hazard of such a deed of violence as that of gagging and pinioning the man at the wheel. Failure, I said, must lead to my being murdered out of hand, and then she was to think of herself as alone with a lawless body of people, who, on the strength of our attempt, would hold themselves discharged from the obligation they now recognized to keep their distance and treat us civilly.

She shuddered at this. "It is the dread," she exclaimed, pressing her hand to her forehead, "of anything happening that might separate us, that might end in leaving me alone with these men—it is *this* dread, Mr. Musgrave, which makes me talk of attempting to escape whilst we are together, and whilst I feel my spirit equal to any call that you can make

upon it. The prospect of an open boat is dreadful, I admit, but it would be paradise in comparison to my finding myself alone in this brig."

"It is because we must remain together, come what may," said I, speaking with a degree of emphasis and passion, as I can now recall, to which I have little doubt in another mood her eyes would have sunk with such a little trembling play of smile on her lips as I had once before noticed, "that I dare not risk our being separated by so much as the movement of a finger, without feeling sure of the result. Besides," I continued, sinking my voice again, "even if we should agree to attempt to escape by the boat, it would be better to wait until we had closed the Cuba coast than commit ourselves to the heart of the great solitude we are now in." I said, gently and soothingly, "You have been shocked by the cruelty of the men in refusing help to the people of the brigantine. Their behaviour has excited a new dread of them in you. You have suffered a little shadow to darken your glorious courage. But again and again you have told me to believe that all

will be well. All *will* be well!' I exclaimed, taking her hand in both mine; "you have too much of the heroine in you to render the issue of this horrible voyage uncertain. Your courage will shine out afresh. A little patience and the gloom will have passed. I need every bit of encouragement you can give me, and shall be the pluckier and the stronger for your own strength and bravery."

She kept her face averted, and a tear fell from her cheek. I believe I never acted more wisely in my life than by leaving her without another word and withdrawing to my cabin, and remaining there until I felt calm enough to be able to talk to her with clear perception of the meaning of my presence on board, and of the object of our journey.

When the dog-watch between six and eight came round, the evening was so gentle and lovely that I cannot remember the like of it. All day long we had kept the brig under the same canvas which had been set in the morning, and she still floated forwards to the tender propulsion of the white cloths, rising in soft spaces to the sun-gilt trucks, whilst the sheen flowing

off the studding-sails, which overhung the sides, trembled in the blue surface under the swinging-boom as though the water were touched with a beam of moonshine there. But the breeze had weakened into a quiet wind that scarcely gave us a speed of three miles in the hour. The sea was tremulous under the warm breathing of the wind, but every ripple ran foamlessly, and the swell was so faint you had to watch the mast-heads to make sure that the airy life you felt in the deck was not fanciful. I had charge of the brig, and often stopped in my walk to exchange a few sentences with Miss Grant, who was seated near the skylight. The ugly half-caste Ladova was at the wheel. A few seamen were sitting on the forecastle-head smoking, but presently I noticed the cook come out of his little caboose with a small kid or tub in his hand, the steam of which seemed grateful to him, for as he walked on to the forecastle he kept his head overhanging it as though inhaling it. He set the kid down very carefully near the scuttle. The loungers in the head gathered round, and seemed to sniff up the incense with great satisfaction, as might be gathered from their

several postures and the expressions on their faces, though I was at too great a distance to hear what they said. The cook returned to the caboose, and shortly afterwards emerged with an armful of pannikins, which he placed close alongside the steaming kid. I eyed these proceedings uneasily. It was not hard to guess that the steam yonder rose from something stronger than water. One of the fellows put his head into the scuttle and called out, and in a few moments the rest of the crew came on deck. Amongst them was Mole, who sprang through the hatch with a fiddle in his hand. His first act was to step up to the kid, dip a pannikin into it, and take a sip. The brew was evidently to his taste, for he gave the cook a nod, drained the pannikin, and screwing the fiddle to his shoulder, fell to tuning it.

"They mean to be merry," said I to Miss Grant.

"Will there not be enough drink in that wooden tub," she said, "to make them intoxicated?"

"Depends on the strength of the mixture," said I. "Mole gave me his word that there

should be no drunkenness aboard us. I fancy the fellows are too distrustful of me to swallow more than will hearten them to a couple of hours of jollity. Strange there should have been a fiddle aboard all this time, and it should never have been played until now. 'Tis to be Jack's *requiem* over Broadwater. God help us! what a muddle that creature has brought us into."

Just then Mole held up his hand to attract my attention. "Jest a bit of sailors' pleasuring, Mr. Musgrave," he sang out; "no more'n 'll help us to tune up our pipes, and put a bit of spring into our flat feet."

I responded quickly, with an answering flourish of my hand. "You're quite right, my lads. Never was there a crew more fairly entitled to a spell of merry-making."

"Boys!" shouted Mole, who seemed somewhat excited, "to the lady, bullies! Dip to her and to his honour atop, my livelies. Time from me, my noble fellows!"

"Hold!" I cried, entering into the spirit of the thing, "let Ladova be of you."

I went to the wheel. "Jump," said I, "and drink our healths!"

He ran forward. Mole then dipped for a second draught, and stood with his pannikin poised, waiting for the others to fill. It was a sea-picture just then to haunt a man to his grave, so charged was the colour, the beauty, the freshness of it, with the horrible significance of the condition of things aboard. The manly, handsome figure of Mole, in white duck trousers, blue shirt leaving his mossy breast bare, round hat perched on the back of his head, arms of a giant naked to above the elbow, holding his pannikin high in marine festive posture—the group behind, with their pannikins upheld in imitation of him, here and there a bright eye gleaming out of a shaggy face past some brawny shoulder, the olive features of the half-blood contrasting with the dingy white of the cook—the smoking crimson background of the west, against whose effulgent reaches, rising from scarlet at the sea-line to a sweep of delicate golden haze over the mastheads, each figure stood out clear cut—the loveliness of the great circle curving from the glory over one cathead into the dark blue of the east, and back again to the effulgent sky and sea over

the bow;—it was indeed a scene not to be lightly forgotten, charged as it was with the spirit of the beauty of the evening, and with the memory of murder and of bitter wrong-doing, and with our present fears.

"Time from me, my livelies!" cried Mole, with a look over either shoulder; then holding his pannikin high and gazing aft, "One—Two—Three!" At the last word, and in utter silence, flash went every man's pannikin to his mouth, and in token that our healths had been effectually drunk, every fellow held his pannikin inverted. The thing was done with a military precision that must have won a laugh from me at any other time; but before merriment was practicable, one wanted to know how much liquor the kid held, and how much spirit had gone to the manufacture of the contents of the little tub.

Miss Grant rose and courtesied towards the forecastle with inimitable grace, whilst I raised my hat to the dumb salute of the inverted pannikins. Then Ladova returned, and I fell to pacing the deck again, saying to Miss Grant, as I lingered abreast of her a moment with a

careless glance aloft, that this was a sign of goodwill on the part of the men that ought to help the courage of us both.

Mole seized his fiddle afresh, and vaulting on to the forecastle-capstan played a brisk polka. Next to jigging, Jack loves polking; the hornpipe heads the list, but the polka stands next. The sailors formed themselves into couples, and in a few moments were twisting and sliding round the musician. There was fun to be got out of even the mere sight of the capers their legs cut, and the enjoyment on their faces grinning over one another's shoulders as they revolved. The cook, wanting a partner, danced alone, a detail of this little passage of jollity that rendered the whole scene inexpressibly childish. I said to Miss Grant, "Is there in all human nature a simpler-hearted creature than the sailor? What landsman could find diversion in dancing as those fellows are? In fact," said I, "Jack has all the simplicity of the savage, with a touch of the savage's unpleasant qualities. There is nothing in memory to hinder him. Observe how heartily Mole saws, as if all had been and still was as well with this ship as at

the day she lay in the Pool. Only a few hours ago one or maybe more yonder struck Broadwater down and tossed him overboard. Yet the punch is not the less sweet to their palates. They shake as lively a foot as any sinless soul could."

"See the half-blood! He dances all over. Every bit of him to his very eyes is on the move. He hops about with pure Spanish enjoyment. That rude deck there might be a ball-room for him, and the rough company of the sailors a polished fandango," said Miss Grant.

"Ay," said I, "and I dare say he would not quiver about the less briskly for the thought that the shadow of the gallows which awaits him lies dark to the light of the setting sun, somewhere behind the slope of that sea-line."

And yet somehow, spite of the gloomy thoughts which came to me out of these merry-making Jacks, there was something in the sound of the fiddle, and in their skimming and twisting figures, to give a deeper oceanic meaning to the whole picture of the brig, slowly pushing her way towards the crimson west, with the ripple from her stem curling into a flash of golden fire as it arched round to the sun, than it got

from the mere sapphire and scarlet and hectic of the heavens, and the lovely blue of the sea floating ahead of us, and melting into the brightness under our jibboom. I thought to myself, What ship sailing within earshot of us would guess that this peaceful brig had been the theatre of tragedies as dreadful in their way as anything of a like kind that has ever happened upon the high seas? But every vessel afloat has an inner and secret life of her own. A procession of ships is like a concourse of human beings; no man can imagine what is passing in the hearts of them—what wild, what glad, what frightful, what pathetic memories may linger in their dark and sealed depths. Viewed from a distance on this evening, the Iron Crown would have presented a spectacle full of beauty, of softness, of gentleness, into which there would have entered a seeming element of happiness, of peace, and of innocence, from the cheerful notes of the fiddle over which yonder manly-looking sailor's head drooped, and from the brisk and hearty figures which slided round about the capstan, with a sailor's true delight in every heave of the leg and in every revolution of the body.

When the polka came to an end, Mole dismounted and handed the fiddle to the half-blood, who, grinning with an almost negro-like countenance of enjoyment, took the other's place, and struck up the well-known hornpipe air, "Jack Robinson." Mole took the deck alone; the others, every man holding a pannikin newly dipped, drew off hot and merry to look on, some sitting, some lounging. Carefully screwing his hat on his head, Mole took the preliminary walk round, and then broke into the ocean-dance, with the perched figure of the half-blood behind him fiddling most ably. I never in all my life saw the hornpipe better danced. There was so much expertness indeed as almost to make one forget one's dislike of the fellow. The admiration of the spectators sobered their grins, and they gazed with sedate appreciation. Sometimes one or another rapped out, "Hurrah, bully! You're the lad for the girls!" "Swing to it, my lively!" "Bully for you, Terry, bully for you!" and the like, accompanied by a frequent lifting of the pannikins. With his hat "on nine hairs," as sailors say, his arms sometimes folded upon his breast, some-

times one hand upon his hip, the other lifted, his loose white trousers fluttering against the scarlet background, his rough hair tossing upon his brow, with the spirit of the thing shining in his eyes, Mole slapped the deck with his feet till it rattled like castanets in the hands of a Spanish dancer, jigging it so inimitably well indeed that Miss Grant could not remove her eyes from him, whilst I gazed positively fascinated by the gilded sea-picture. Indeed, it stirred old memories in me as nothing else had done since we first weighed anchor. It took me back to the forecastle of the grand old Indiaman when the sultry dog-watch was growing cool to the dewy eastern shadow. I clapped my hands loudly when Mole, half-breathless with exertion and purple with heat, brought his dance to an end with a smart blow of his foot and a bow to us aft, as finely managed as any courtier could have contrived it. Then after an interval he took the fiddle again, and the others fell a-dancing, and when they were tired they sang songs.

By this time the evening had drawn over us. There were long lines of hectic in the west and

rusty streaks of expiring scarlet, but the stars were shining brilliantly, and the gloom of the night was already darkening out the forecastle upon the eye into an airy dusk, amid which the shapes of the seamen were scarcely visible. But I had already noticed with satisfaction that the tub, which had been tilted that the last drop might be dipped out of it, was left unreplenished. One fellow sang with a fine voice—who it was I knew not ; it was a clear rich baritone, and went floating up amongst the sails, whose wan hollows gave the notes back in dim echoes. I leaned with Miss Grant over the rail listening. An occasional delicate sob of water rose from the clear profound, clouded with misty bursts of sea fire, which, mingling with the fellow's voice, gave a quality of softness and even of pathos to it. Nearly all the songs sung were of a sentimental cast, and were accompanied by either Mole or Charles with the fiddle ; and though broad daylight would no doubt have found the sounds for the most part commonplace enough, yet the airs, even when delivered by some hoarser pipe than usual, took a note of romance and a quality of unreality from the overshadow-

ing presence of the liquid night, the melancholy spaciousness of the dark sea extending on all sides, the dimness of the extended wings of canvas on high, the stillness upon the deep that was scarce disturbed by the breathing of the warm, dew-laden night-wind into the sails, and the almost oppressive hush you found when amid the intervals of the songs you sent your gaze into the dark blue dome brilliant with stars which jewelled every point of spar, every shadowy end of boom, every phantasmal length of yard of the faint, pale fabric, looming large above the delicate glimmer of the decks.

All was hushed and in darkness forward ; one figure alone could be made out crossing the stars in a regular pendulum tread on the forecastle, when Mole came aft to relieve me. The excitement of the drink and the dance had gone out of him. He said, "Ye see the men are well in hand, Mr. Musgrave ; there's nothen to be feared from their *liquorizing*, as I told you."

"I was glad to notice that," I answered ; "your jollifications, indeed your doings of any kind, are no concern of mine outside the lady's

safety and my own. I heartily wish that you understood navigation, and that you could take charge of the brig, for in that case you would have no objection to putting Miss Grant and me aboard the first craft that would be willing to take us. The deuce of it is, Mr. Mole," continued I—for I hoped he might have come to me with a disposition rendered a trifle generous by the dog-watch festivity, and would be willing therefore to talk a little more freely than at another time—"the lady is bound to Rio under my charge, to be married to a cousin of mine who lives at that place, and the road there by way of Cuba threatens so long a delay, that besides the secret grieving of the lady over her prolonged separation from her sweetheart —and you, Mr. Mole, as an English sailor, will understand her feelings—there is the worry of my cousin to be considered. He will think the ship lost; he may fancy me false to my trust perhaps."

He waited a little before answering, and then said very civilly, "I can quite onderstand yours and the lady's feelings. We're all sorry for ye both, I assure you; but we don't mean to let

Charles swing ; we don't intend to put ourselves in the way of the law, and so, as you've been already given plain to onderstand, Mr. Musgrave, there mustn't be, and there won't be, no speaking of ships. 'Sides," he continued, with a sudden rounding upon me, so to speak, in his manner, "supposing the hands consented to your trans-shipping yourselves, ain't it a million to one that the vessel *wouldn't* be bound to Rio, or anywheres near it ? In that case," he added with a laugh, which he instantly checked, "you're as well off here ; for Cuba's nearer to Rio than the Cape o' Good Hope or the Indies 'ud be, and for all you know, the ship you enter might be bound to them parts, or further off still—to Chiney or New Zealand."

Spite of his civil manner, I judged there was little more to come from a chat with him than ill-temper on his side and increased mortification and anxiety on mine, so telling him that the course to be steered throughout the night was the course we had been heading all day, I went below to join Miss Grant. I told her what Mole had said, and we sat talking till about nine o'clock ; and then observing her to look

very weary, for she had slept but little during the previous night, I begged her to withdraw, saying that I myself needed rest, as I should have to turn out again at twelve o'clock. Nevertheless, though professing myself tired, I was in no humour to go to bed. It was impossible to sit alone in that cabin without thinking of old Broadwater, a fancy that sent the eye instinctively to the smudge that still lurked darkly in the stain of the wood at the foot of the cabin-steps. A stouter heart than mine might have owned to a sense of timidity without a feeling of shame. The voyage indeed had been more like a nightmare than the grim reality it was, with its teeming life of brutality and ugly deeds. It seemed but yesterday that the brig had floated past the bald terrace of the South Foreland, and yet in the brief interval of the few weeks seven men of our slender company had vanished one after another, and every man to such an accompaniment of tragic and scaring conditions as to cause the memory of his death or of his going to lie upon the mind with the significance of yonder stain upon the planks. Then again I was haunted by the

recollection of the gaping and supplicating figures which had that morning piteously motioned to us for help, and of the white bearded old man whose uplifted eyes and trembling, pointing hand had made his curse upon us as articulate as though the ear had received every syllable of the malediction.

But this sitting alone, with nothing to break in upon one's thoughts but the thin, weak groans of the fabric stealthily swayed, was but melancholy work. I went to my cabin, and was about to undress myself, when it occurred to me, that since the brig was now in possession of the crew, whose condition might not be quite so sober as that of Mole, it would be as well for me to look to my pistols. I charged and primed them both, and then remembering that Miss Grant had talked as though she could handle a fire-arm with thorough knowledge of its use, I resolved to give her one of the brace to lodge under her pillow, or to place ready to hand. I did not doubt that a spirit such as hers would find something tonical and supporting in the mere notion of a loaded weapon lying close to her grasp. In sober

truth, I feared more for her than for myself. My life was too serviceable to the men just now to render me uneasy on my own account; but it was otherwise with Miss Grant. Who could tell but that amongst that lawless band there were some—even one—with instincts to be easily rendered devilish with liquor? I see myself now, standing in that little cabin, grasping a pistol in either hand, my imagination forward in the forecastle, picturing the dim light of the slush-lamp there, flinging its faint, wavering illumination over the seamen sitting in their bunks, or with hairy faces overhanging the edges of their hammocks, dangerously gay-hearted with the drink they had drained, and with the dance and songs, which, coming into their hard lives, were a sort of intoxication in themselves, talking of their jinks ashore, of their carousals, of their Polls and Susans, till one of them perhaps would speak of Miss Grant——

I opened my door, crossed the narrow passage, and gently knocked upon the bulkhead of my companion's cabin. She instantly asked who it was that knocked. I answered.

In a few moments she opened the door. The light from my own cabin-lamp was upon her, for the berths were exactly abreast. Her hair hung upon her shoulders, one hand grasped the neck of her dressing-gown against her white throat, giving her an aspect of sudden alarm, which the peculiar brilliance of her steadfast eyes could not have defeated but for the composure of her lips.

"What is it, Mr. Musgrave?" she asked.

I now regretted my action. Here was I grasping a brace of pistols, and it seemed a stupid and nervous bit of behaviour in me to disturb this girl, and thus confront her.

"You have told me you are not afraid of fire-arms," I exclaimed. "It has occurred to me that one of these—"

She looked at the weapon I extended with a smile, then without a word entered her cabin and returned.

"There," she exclaimed, "you will see that I am as fully prepared as you. Indeed I think I am better off, for yours, I fancy, are a little old-fashioned, whilst mine I am sure would prove the deadlier weapon."

She stepped aside that the light might shine upon the pistol she held. It was a very handsome piece, with a long glittering barrel, mounted in silver. "See," she exclaimed, raising it. Her nostrils trembled, she drew herself erect with a slight backward leaning of her head, and levelled the pistol past me with a smile that was made almost scornful by the proud, sparkling determination of the gaze she fixed upon me. Oh, for a painter's brush to give you the queenly figure and pose of her as she thus stood! Her arms sank to her side, and she said quietly, "Have no fear for me, Mr. Musgrave. Should I be called upon to defend myself, I shall know how to do it."

I again wished her good-night, and returned to my cabin, feeling somehow, as Jonathan says, a bit mean, though for what reason I do not know, unless it was that such a combination of beauty, coolness, and courage made one fancy that the best sort of manhood in comparison with it could not but be somewhat insignificant. Indeed it did me good to think of the tear she had let fall that day, and to remember that

now and again a natural timidity and fear had broken out. After all, thought I, as I looked round for a convenient hiding-place for my pistols, it is always the woman that forms the most admirable part of the heroine.

CHAPTER VI.

MAROONED.

HOWEVER, as it turned out, the fears which had led me to the handling of my fire-arms and to my disturbing Miss Grant, proved groundless. The night passed quietly. Mole roused me at eight bells by beating over my head, and when I went on deck I found him as vigilant as need be, the ship sailing quietly along, the watch below turning out, everything as orderly, in short, as though Broadwater still had charge, with Mr. Bothwell at hand as an instrument to drive discipline home with.

So it was next day, and so it was next night, and for many days and many nights afterwards. For a whole week together we sailed along without handling a brace or lifting the clews of a royal. To be sure, it was weather to be

expected in those parallels. The trade-wind hummed over our quarter, sometimes merrily enough to put an edge of froth to the curl of dark blue ripple, sometimes so softly that I would think we had lost it, when I noticed the light, long, azure swathes winding as unwrinkled as a surface of polished steel to the blue distance with the shadowing of the tender draught between. The men were very orderly; they kept to their quarters, and never one of them, with the exception of Mole or the cook, who punctually waited upon us, so much as put a foot upon the companion steps. They did no work; the decks remained unwashed; what trifling decoration of brass there was about the vessel grew green; the paintwork became grimy and blotched with heat and neglect; the sailors lounged about the deck all day, smoking and yarning, and then when the cool of the second dog-watch came, they would fill their little tub with punch, dance, sing songs, and fall to the sort of merry-making I have described. The pigs belonging to the brig they killed by degrees, and also made free with the cabin provisions and the live stock; but our

own private stores they never offered to touch. Every day, after working out my observations, I would show Mole our position on the chart, but I was careful not to question him. In fact his own and the resolved attitude of the others satisfied me that they had made up their minds, that they had agreed upon a scheme from which nothing was to divert them, and of which it was their intention to keep me in ignorance; and I saw there was no remedy for Miss Grant and myself but patience.

Well, the time passed in this way, one day being the counterpart of another, and the hours seemed as minutes when one looked back, so monotonous it all was, though our consuming expectation and anxiety made the end seem so remote that I would feel sometimes as if I must fall mad from the mere waiting for it. Now and again, but at long intervals, we sighted a sail; but it was always at a distance, and I would bring my eye with a sort of loathing in me from the gleam of it, so ironical would be its accentuation of our condition, so idle and distracting the yearnings it awoke in me. But one day there came a change of weather. A

shift of wind had happened in the morning watch when I was below, and when I went on deck I found the atmosphere thick, the breeze off the port-bow, and the brig under all plain sail, with the yards braced fore and aft. I made nothing of this at first, for I never doubted that it would brighten out into tropical fairness again in an hour; but finding that it continued, I grew uneasy. For, as I could catch no sight of the sun, there was nothing for it but to depend upon dead reckoning; and as throughout I had no very profound faith in myself as a navigator, and less faith still in the accuracy of old Broadwater's rusty appliances of aged quadrant and infirm chronometer, I feared that my earlier calculations, supplemented by such guesswork as dead reckoning implies, would find me all adrift when the time came, as I should suppose, to report that Cuba might be looked for in twelve or twenty-four hours. I say I was afraid, for reassuring as might be the behaviour of the men *now*, it was impossible to foresee what posture they would take if they should find me wrong in my navigation. Indeed my very life might depend upon my

accuracy. They would suspect I had wilfully deceived them, and God alone knows what usage I should receive from them if they worked themselves into a passion over this fancy.

The nights were as thick as the days. I never turned out in the dark without an eager look aloft; but the gloom came down to our mastheads; not the leanest phantom of a star was ever visible, and the dawn was again and again the same feeble filtering of granite-coloured light through a sullen grayness of heaven that yet left the sea-line bare to its confines; and the breeze blowing warm and moist as a woman's breath over the olive-tinctured deep, never once parted this melancholy shadow into a break wide enough to give us the dimmest view of the azure behind it. I told Mole that as the brig was off her course, with a certain amount of leeway to be accounted for, and as I had nothing to depend upon but the log-line, it would be impossible for me to guarantee that we should hit the Cuba coast. I said this to him at noon on the second day of the thick weather, whilst

with quadrant in hand I stood hoping for an apparition of the sun.

He looked at me suspiciously under the mat of hair that drooped upon his brow, and said, "But we ain't outside five days' sail of it, are we?"

"About that," I answered.

"Then how can we fail hitting the island?" he exclaimed. "It's long enough; there's range of coast to keep it in sight if it was as high in the air as the moon is. The brig's head's west by north, half-north, two and a half points off. Our position being known, we shall be able to tell when it is time to go about."

"Ay," said I, "but put her about, and where will she be heading to? South-south-east won't serve our turn, Mr. Mole. Besides, I'm not sure of the currents hereabouts. Captain Broadwater's instruments are not of the best, you must know, and his charts are as old as his quadrant. He had made the run to Rio so often that he could smell his way along; but here am I, no experienced navigator, mind you, heading right away off Broadwater's course,

and thrusting into a smother that leaves me nothing but the log-line to work my way by."

I saw he did not like this at all. He eyed me very uneasily, with a shadow of temper rising to his face.

"Should be mere crow-flying work, it seems to me," he exclaimed; "'tain't as if it was a rock you was heading for. Look at the length of the Cuba coast, sir, on the chart. West by south's the course; that's ondoubted, if the compass don't lie. Werry well; you're within five days of a range pretty nigh as long as one side of Europe. How can ye be a-missing of it with the log a-going every two hours, and the course showing clear in yonder binnacle?"

"As you are so cock-sure," said I, defiantly, "I heartily wish you would relieve me of the responsibility of navigating the vessel. Since you know all about it, take charge of her! I've done my best, and will resign my trust gladly."

"No, no, by ——," he cried, with an oath; "we've kept to our side of the agreement, you keep to yourn. You ondertook, under conditions which the crew's complied with, to

navigate this brig to within a day's sail of Cuba, and then tell us when we was arrived at it. We must hold ye to that, sir," he added, with a dark look.

"What I've done, I've done honestly," said I; "I have been as loyal on my side as I admit the crew have been conscientious on theirs. Use me as you will—I am in your power and cannot help myself, and you know it!—I have performed *my* share of the cursed compact!" with which I turned on my heel, leaving him standing and following me with his eyes.

Well, for five days and five nights the thick weather lasted. The end then came, very fortunately for me, for had this spell of bitter anxiety been protracted another week, I believe my mind would have become unhinged. The distrust of the men had grown so keen that they watched me as if I were a rattle-snake. Their very ignorance of navigation rendered them the more suspicious. Every day Mole took the chart forward and showed them where we were, by dead reckoning, and you would see them shouldering one another as they looked, flinging a note of growling upon the

air with their combined utterances, pointing to the chart with their thumbs, and then gazing around the sea as if there should be something *there* to furnish them with a hint of the true situation of the brig.

At four o'clock on the morning of the sixth day, when Mole arrived on the quarter-deck to relieve me, the ocean lay as darkly shrouded as it had been at any time since the first of this gloom had gathered around us. The wind had shifted at noon on the previous day, and the course I then shaped was west-south-west, but at midnight it had headed us again, and the brig had broken off to west by north. Yet the breeze had been steady throughout; we had shown royals to it the whole time, and it had made life as easy-going aboard as ever the steady wafting of the trade-wind had; that is to say, it demanded no pulling and hauling from the men, no furling or setting again. Under a close luff the Iron Crown broke the short gray seas with her larboard bow with a handsome trend to leeward, as was to be noticed by the run of the short streak of oily wake veering away on the quarter.

Mole was grim and surly as an unshaven sailor newly awakened when he arrived. I was not less sullen than he, sick at heart with the four hours' straining of my eyes in search of a star, and weary besides with the fatigue that comes to a man out of anxiety, idle conjecture, and a sense of uncertainty, that in my case was heightened by waiting into a sort of anguish. I briefly and sulkily gave him the news of the four hours, which amounted to nothing, and with a yawn and a shiver went below, and to bed.

I was awakened from a deep sleep by a thumping of heavy knuckles on the bulkhead outside. I started up, conceiving I had overslept myself; that it was past the hour, in short, when I should have relieved Mole; but on looking at my watch, which hung at hand, I observed it was but seven o'clock. The knocking was repeated.

"Who's there?" I sang out.

The gruff voice of a seaman named Williamson answered, "Mr. Mole wants ye on deck, sir."

"Right," I answered, jumping out of my

bunk, whilst I wondered if some fresh tragedy had happened, for my being called in this way brought the morning of Broadwater's disappearance to my mind, and that was a memory to crowd my imagination with a score of black fears and anticipations. Meanwhile I took notice that the weather had cleared, and that it was a fine bright morning. The shining of the sunlight upon the scuttle puzzled me. It came full to the glass in a brimming of white splendour off the sea, whereas if we were holding our course the luminary should be nearly astern, with a slanting of his radiance along our sides, out of which no beam could twist to lie as the light now lay in a circular tremble of pale gold upon the door facing the scuttle. Nor could I immediately fail to observe that the brig floated steady. My ear was too practised not to rightly interpret the slopping sounds of water against the run. She rolled slightly with much internal creaking, as was natural to her; but I did not need to go on deck to gather that either her topsail was to the mast or that her anchor was down.

What had happened? I lingered a minute

or two outside my cabin-door, with my ear against the bulkhead of Miss Grant's berth. All was still within. I knocked, then called out gently, "Is it well with you, Miss Grant?"

"Yes; what is it now, Mr. Musgrave?" she replied.

I answered, "I cannot tell. I am now going on deck."

"I will join you shortly," she said.

It was comforting to hear her voice. In such a vessel as the Iron Crown it was impossible to know what might happen from hour to hour, and I protest, when I listened and heard no sound in my companion's cabin, such a chill of dismay for an instant fell upon my heart, that the sensation was as bad in its way as the realization of a fear. But all was well with her, and without further lingering I stepped on deck.

It takes a man a little time to collect the details of a picture. For a moment perhaps I stood in the companion-way, looking aloft and upon the decks, and then round upon the sea. The brig, as I had expected to find her, was hove-to. Her mainsail was hauled up, the topsail

aback, the royals clewed down. It was a very clear, brilliant morning. Every vestige of the leaden, oppressive atmosphere that had environed us throughout the week had disappeared. The sea-line ran with a crystalline sheen like the edge of a lens out of the west; carrying the airy, delicate gleam with it in its curvature to the east, where it broke into white flame under the hot and mounting sun.

Directly on our starboard-beam, at the distance of a mile or less, stood an island. The blue went past it on both hands and the atmospheric hue of the sky beyond was assurance positive to the nautical eye that the ocean was on *that* side as well as on this. It showed a seaboard of a couple of miles; the foreshore of it apparently coral sand, which to the sunshine dazzled out almost blindingly against the dark green background of bush, tree, and small savanna. Here and there that lustrous beach curved into a little creak with an overhanging of palm-trees on either side of it, like human beings bowing to one another. The breeze was light, there was scarce an undulation of swell, and the thin line of surf

crawling out of the blue surface on to the sand came to the eye in a radiant tremble; the shivering of it seemed to put a sort of pulsing into the whole of the foreshore, as though the steamy heat of the atmosphere caused the land to writhe upon the sight. It was a low island, a Cay, as I might gather, of the true Bahaman type, with a green hummock or two amidships of it; here and there a volcanic-like protuberance of land, with verdant slopes refreshing to the eye to rest upon, and a kind of swarming of trees in places, their tops above the sky-line of the shore, and their branches defining a fibrine conformation as delicate as coral against the liquid azure past them.

The sailors leaned over the side of the brig looking at this island. Mole stood gazing at it close to the companion, with his arms folded, manifestly waiting for me to appear. I was a minute however in the hatch before he was sensible of my presence.

"That's not Cuba, sir," he exclaimed, instantly levelling his finger at the island.

At the sound of his voice the fellows who were hanging over the rail looked round,

and two or three of them dismounted and drew near; but merely, as I believed, the better to hear what I had to say, for there was nothing threatening in their manner or faces.

"No," said I, stepping out of the hatch to command a clearer view of the horizon, "that island is assuredly not Cuba, as you say, Mr. Mole. 'Tis a Cay, with a name of its own, I don't doubt. Our drift must have been to the north of west, with a set of current that has thrown me all abroad in my reckonings. I'll step below for the chart."

"Never mind about the chart," he exclaimed, with a note in his voice that brought me to a dead stand in a second; "that island's beknown to us."

The half-blood Charles came from the rail with his hands in his breeches-pockets. "*I* know it," he exclaimed, with a peculiar expression in the roll of his sloe-like eyes upon me; "it'll do as well as Cuba—maybe better," he added, speaking the words through his nose with a Yankee drawl.

"What is the island?" I asked.

"It'll be in the West Indie boiling, anyhow," answered the half-blood; "it's all right. No civilization on it; no blasted lawyers to choke a man for doing his messmates a good turn." He whistled softly, with a half-smile at Mole, then swung on his heel and returned to the rail.

Mole eyed me steadfastly, like a man considering; the others methought with something of pity mingled with rough curiosity in the air with which they surveyed me. A miserable feeling of uneasiness possessed my mind. Mole's manner was authoritative, and even insolent, a behaviour he had no need to open his mouth to utter. But the others showed a sort of indifference; the men at the rail just looked at me, then resumed their posture of surveying the island; the two or three who had drawn near eyed me, but, as I have said, with curiosity only, for I could witness no malevolence in their regard. I confess I would have been less scared had the whole of them closed around me on my arrival in a hubbub of savage cries and threats, charging me with having deceived them, and

the like. This at least would have been consistent with the apprehensions which had almost worn me out during the past week; but the careless, half-composed demeanour they now opposed to me was absolutely terrifying, and I vow 'twas almost a relief to turn from those inquisitive faces, as of those of a crowd in a street staring at some one injured, or in a fit, to the more defined expression on Mole's face, showing sullenly some dark resolution at heart.

I put my hand to my brow and swept the sea-line. It ran without a break to the resplendent shaft of sunlight in its bosom.

"Is this the only island in sight?" I asked.

"Yes," said Mole curtly.

"Ay, but I mean," I exclaimed, "is there no more land visible from the masthead?"

"There's a film away to the west'ards in sight from the cross-trees, that's all," he answered grimly, no longer softening his words with the "sirs" he was used to give me. "We should have been ashore had it held thick. The course ye gave me was dead on end for it."

I glanced at the topsail hollowing backwards to the mast, then at the island, then at him, and said suddenly, "What do you mean to do?"

He fetched a deep breath, and said, "After you and the lady have breakfasted, we'll put ye ashore."

On hearing this, the men who were standing near us at the bulwarks approached, and looked on and listened; yet they exhibited little more than curiosity in their manner.

"Do I understand," said I, controlling my voice, "that it is your intention to put the lady and me ashore upon that little island, and *leave us there?*"

"Yes," he answered, trying to look me full in the face; but his eyes fell to my stare of horror and astonishment.

"Men," I cried, rounding upon the others, "this is hard usage to give a man who has served you as I have. Even though *I* should have deserved this treatment, what has the lady done to merit it? Her sympathies were with you all from the very hour——"

"For God Almighty's sake, don't *argue,*

Mr. Musgrave," cried Mole, stamping heavily with his foot, and accompanying the gesture by a nervous sweep of his arm. "Our minds are made up. Had yonder island been Cuba, it would have been the same; we'd have set ye both ashore. You and the lady are witnesses we're bound to leave behind us, no matter where. It *must* be done!"

He stamped again. I looked at the half-blood, and was about to address him, but he immediately returned to the rail, and there hung whistling, keeping time by drumming with his fingers.

"Mr. Mole," said I, "it is in your power to give us a better chance for our lives than yonder island will provide. Why do you fear us as witnesses? I am willing to take any oath you and the others may require to keep the events of this voyage secret. Miss Grant will do the same. Put us in the way of reaching some inhabited coast—send us adrift, if you will, within a day's reach of a town, I do not care where it may be—but to land and leave us *there!*" I pointed to the island.

He turned his back upon me, and walked

without reply a few steps forward, then turning suddenly and extending his arm, with his great hand clenched, cried out, "Mr. Musgrave, I have begged ye not to argue. It'll do no good. When a man's in hell he's got damnation enough." He swept his hair off his brow and continued, "Your breakfast 'll be sarved afore long, and we shall then want you to be ready. She'll carry ye," nodding towards the quarter-boat; "the water's smooth, and you can take what you will that belongs to you. Best bear a hand to get your traps together, for we've got no notion ourselves of hanging hove-to here." He turned his back again upon me, thrust in among four or five men who were at the bulwarks, and stood with them looking at the island.

"Do they mean to set us ashore, Mr. Musgrave?"

Miss Grant was at my side, glancing from the island to around her, with a face in which one saw the first flushing of consternation yielding to a cooler mood even as one watched it.

"Yes," I answered.

"What island is that?" she exclaimed.

"I do not know," I replied.

"Can you not find out?"

"It is doubtless one of the Bahama group, but which it is impossible to say, seeing how wildly wrong I have proved in my reckonings. It is seemingly known to the half-blood, but there is nothing to be got from him or from the others, the merciless villains!"

"Is it inhabited?" she inquired.

"No. If it were I should welcome the act of cruelty as a deliverance from an intolerable situation."

She took me by the arm, and led me a little distance aft out of earshot of the men. Mole peered at us past the rounded back of another fellow, with irritable impatience in his posture of doing so. She viewed the island for a little while without speaking, apparently lost in thought. Her breath came and went tranquilly. The fear that had for a moment or two shone in her eyes being gone, I could not discern the least symptom of alarm in her. I stood silent, marvelling at her composure, wondering indeed whether it did not owe much

to her inability to compass what the men's intentions signified to us. Presently she said quietly, "Will not the chart in the cabin tell us what this island is?"

"I will look when I go below," I replied; but added bitterly, "How should the name of it concern us——?"

She interrupted me: "No; but if we can discover its situation, the chart would show us which is the nearest inhabited land, so that we shall know in which direction to steer when we leave that place." I was about to speak. "Oh, Mr. Musgrave," she exclaimed softly, with the faintest tremor in her voice, though her face flushed to the spirit of resolution in her, "I would rather things should be as they are—I would indeed! Our life in this vessel has grown unendurable. My nights are miserable. I can scarcely rest for thought of the plans those fellows there may be hatching. We shall be together on that island; the nightmare of fancy that haunts me of being left alone on this brig—of our being separated through some deed of violence—will be ended. The worst has come, so far as *they* are

concerned," she continued, with a shuddering half-turn of her face towards the seamen, "and there at least," directing her glance at the island, "I shall be spared the hundred daily and nightly dreads which terrify me here. It is hard, it is hard!" she muttered in an almost musing way, "but it is less than I feared. They never meant that you should be able to bear witness against the half-blood, against themselves. Some kind of end must have come, Mr. Musgrave. It is miserable as it is; but time after time my terror has foreboded something infinitely worse."

It was afterwards that I recognized the truth of her words; but just then I was so wild and crazed by this blow, by the cold, calculating inhumanity of the men, in whose demeanour I had never witnessed the least hint of such barbarous usage as they were now about to give us, which throughout had been their intention towards us, and which doubtless was the reason of their demand that I should let them know when we were within a day's sail of the Cuba coast—I say that at that time the conflict of emotions was so violent in me, I could

get nothing out of the composure and thoughtful words of the sweet and noble woman at my side but a sort of dull wonder at her tranquillity.

"Your breakfast's gone below, Mr. Musgrave," shouted Mole; "me and my mates 'll be obliged by you and the lady bearing a hand. Another half-hour's as much as we can allow ye."

"Let us go to the cabin," said Miss Grant; "your heart will come to you again soon. I declare I thank God for this thing as a deliverance."

She led the way, and I followed. The cook was lingering at the table, as though adjusting it to his taste, but on our showing ourselves he ran hastily up the steps, fearful perhaps that we should address him. It was not a time to think of eating. For my part, I believe a crumb of biscuit would have sufficed to choke me. In truth, the long hours of bitter anxiety I had suffered had unnerved me; but to what extent I should not have known but for this sudden testing of my courage. I saw Miss Grant look as though she meant to force herself to partake

of the meal, to embolden me by a further illustration of her coolness, but she turned away after a minute, and said, "What is next to be done?"

"We must pack up our traps," said I; "we are at liberty to carry our luggage ashore. Ashore! Good God!"

I could scarcely utter the words. You talk of going ashore when newly arrived off a town; or if off a coast, you go ashore to return again to the ship; but to think of going ashore to this little island, to stop there with nothing in sight but a blue streak of haze, visible only from the elevation of the cross-trees——

"Shall we take all we have?" asked Miss Grant, as collectedly, I protest, as if this Atlantic Ocean were the English Channel, and there was a boat alongside ready to carry us to Plymouth or Dover.

"Yes," I answered, almost mechanically, for this was a detail indeed I found it hard to bend my mind down to; "throw what you have into your boxes and portmanteaux. I will wait for you here."

In five minutes I had stowed my possessions

away, and then going to Broadwater's berth, drew a chart of the West India Islands from the bag, and returned with it to the cabin. I overhung it eagerly, but to little purpose. Here was a stretch of islands starting from high abreast of the Florida coast and trending away down to Dominica, and which of them that green and gleaming spot of land out to starboard was, it was hopeless to conjecture. At a later date I might have put my finger upon it without much trouble, but Broadwater's charts were exceedingly old, and this one of the West Indies was complicated and disfigured with ink-marks and dim tracings like a school-boy's lesson-book. However, there could be no doubt that this island fringed the thicker zone, that it was some eastward sentinel Cay, such as Rum, Cat, or Watling Island, and that civilization therefore bore from it as the sun set; so that our course, should we make shift to get away, must lie to the west and south.

Whilst I pored upon the chart, the companion was darkened by the figure of a man, and the imperious voice of Mole rang down, "Are ye ready, Mr. Musgrave?"

"I am waiting for the lady," I replied.

I took the chart, and went to the foot of the companion-steps with it. "Mr Mole," I said, "I have served you as honestly as it was possible to me in the navigation of this brig. It is surely not too much to ask you the name of the island over the side, that I may fix its position here," pointing to the chart, "so as to be able to tell in what quarter of this bare sea the inhabited lands lie?"

"The name's of no consequence, nor its bearings either," he responded gruffly; "ten to one if it's wrote down on a chart that's brought us up with a round turn leagues and leagues clear of the coast we aimed at. Bear a hand, if you please, sir; the men are growing impatient."

I flung the chart down on the deck. It was a merciful thing I had not armed myself, for I was so mad just then it was as likely as not that I should have drawn upon the ruffian, and paid the penalty by being tossed over the side with a lump of holystone seized to my feet. Miss Grant came out of the cabin.

"I am ready," she exclaimed; "are we expected to carry our luggage on deck?"

I called to Mole, who still stood at the head of the companion-ladder, "You can send a couple of men for the boxes," and so saying, I conducted Miss Grant through the hatch.

They had lowered the boat and brought her alongside under the gangway, that was unshipped with steps over it. A few of the men eyed us askant as though ashamed, yet too curious not to steal a glance. The half-blood was one of these. I thought to myself—"You beauty! Old Broadwater after all had the true gauging of your nature. If ever the gallows were put to a profitable use, it will be when *you* dangle from it, bleaching to the wind!" I stood with folded arms, my eyes rooted to the deck, Miss Grant by my side, neither of us speaking. Somehow the sense of bitter humiliation induced by the thought of the sort of men they were who were using us thus, weakened the deep emotion of dismay with which I contemplated our abandonment upon that island. In a few minutes a couple of fellows arrived, bearing our luggage. There were four or five boxes and port-

manteaux, along with a carpet-bag or two, some bundles of rugs, a hat-box, and the like; and I cannot express the horrible accentuation these prosaic things gave to our condition when one looked from them to over the rail at the line of white surf melting into the sparkling sand, with the greenery beyond, without a hint even of savage human structure to relieve the spirit of wildness which was swept into the heart of the lonely place out of the infinite ocean distance by the blue line of the horizon going past it on either hand. The two men who had brought the luggage dropped over the side into the boat; the boxes and port-manteaux were handed over.

"Now, sir," said Mole.

I was about to speak. Miss Grant clasped my hand. "Hush!" she whispered, "come!"

Without a word I got over the side and helped her to descend. Suddenly some one cried out, "They're going ashore without anything to eat or drink."

"'Vast with that boat, Jim!" shouted Mole.

There was a pause of a few minutes, then what was left of our private stores was passed over, along with a couple of beakers of fresh water and a jar of spirits belonging to the brig. "Shove off!" sung out Mole, "and bear a hand back, lads."

The two fellows threw their oars over, and the little boat, deep with the weight of the provisions, the luggage, and the four people in her, glided shorewards over the blue rippling surface. It happened strangely enough that the two men were of the three (the half-blood being the third) who had pulled us aboard the Iron Crown from Deal. They were both Englishmen, with a ginger-coloured fork of beard, a wrinkled skin, dingy with weather, and covered with knobs like the foot of a sea-boot. They never offered to speak to us, and strenuously avoided meeting our eyes, watching indeed the sheering of their blades through the clear under the sapphire edge, as though indeed they were a couple of draper's assistants out for an hour's row. I held Miss Grant's hand, scarce conscious of what I was doing, though

I afterwards remembered that she cherished my hold of it, as though, with a woman's sympathy, she believed I drew courage from the pressure of her fingers, and for that reason let me have my way. Had we been going ashore to some bright town full of life and conveniences, whence in a day or two we should be able to start for Rio, she could not have shown herself more perfectly tranquil and easy. Once she looked behind her at the receding form of the brig, and breathed deep a moment, but the respiration was not a sigh. For my part I never turned my head; my eyes were fixed upon the island we were approaching, but with a feeling of numbness in my mind which rendered curiosity so languid that I gazed as if it were some passing scene in which I had no other concern than that of a spectator.

The men made for the nearest of the creeks, where the tender lift of the summer sea ran foamless to the shadows cast by the leaning trees on either side; the boat's forefoot struck the almost snow-white sand, which went winding up like a silver trail

through the herbage, as you notice it on the Mozambique or Natal seaboard, and the sailor in the bows jumped out. The spit of shore that formed the right-hand shoulder of this creek, looking seawards, shelved so flatly to the wash of the surf, that you saw the ocean spreading beyond it to the open sky, with the brig, her topsail still aback, barely leaning from the wind, her canvas and hull dark against the flashing water and the airy splendour beyond her. I threw a look at her *now*, and thought I could distinguish the tall figure of Mole, watching us through a glass which he steadied against a backstay. The seamen who remained in the boat handed out our luggage and provisions, parcel by parcel, to the other, who dragged or carried them a few yards clear of the water's edge. On this freight being discharged, I went into the bow and stepped ashore, Miss Grant springing easily from the gunwale with her hand upon my outstretched arm. My inward rage and despair raised so great an aversion in me to the two sailors, that the mere being

addressed by them would have been intolerable, and I was brisk in quitting the boat and in assisting Miss Grant, that they might have no excuse to *order* us ahsore. But I had no sooner felt the ground under my feet than the conviction seized me that we were to be left without a boat! I had not thought of this. My consternation, ever since Mole had apprised me of the intentions of the crew, had been so great that such considerations as had entered my mind were, as I may say, instinctive only; by which I mean, that when a thought occurred to me it was accompanied by a sort of dull notion of its being true. I had—I know not why—reckoned in this mechanical, instinctive way upon our being furnished with a boat; had looked at the chart with that fancy in my mind, and concluded that when we left the island we must steer to the west and to the south; the unconsidered idea in me being that we should be provided with a boat. But now I understood that these men, to return to the brig, must go away with the boat, and that the girl and I were to be marooned to the very

height of the meaning of the wild old buccaneering word!

One fellow sat ready to back water; the other, standing in the bows, was in the act of poling the little craft off to get her head seawards. I sprang in a bound to the very lip of the shaling water.

"My God, men!" I cried, articulating with difficulty, so tremulously was my heart beating, so choking was the sense of constriction in my throat, "you do not mean to leave us here without any means of escaping? Lads, as sailors and Englishmen, show some pity. We are without a refuge!" I cried almost hysterically, pointing inland; "without tools, without skill to contrive a fabric to escape from this horrible solitude. Men, as you are English sailors——"

"Shove her off, Bill," growled the fellow in the stern. "Away with us! There's no use *talking*, and nothen can come of listening."

The boat's head sped round to the thrust of the oar; the two blades dipped—sparkled—dipped again; in a few moments she was clear

of the creek, with the two rowers bending to their toil as though they were pulling for a wager.

I walked slowly to where Miss Grant was standing. I think for a little while I must have been off my head, as the common saying goes, for I recollect shaking my fist at the boat and the brig beyond, and heaping fifty curses upon the crew; until exhaustion, combined with the sweltering heat of the sun striking off the white dusty dazzle upon which we stood, came to my rescue, and most mercifully silenced me. Miss Grant never spoke, never offered to interrupt or check me. She allowed me to talk myself out, and then taking hold of the sleeve of my coat, quietly drew me to one of the trunks that stood under the shadow of a tree, upon which by a gentle movement of her hand she induced me to sit, and then extracting a little silver-mounted bottle of refreshing scent from her pocket, she damped her handkerchief with it, and held it to my forehead.

I believe, had there been a tear in my composition my eyes would have distilled it at that moment.

I broke from my spell of womanly weakness with a very passion of resolution.

"I will not ask you to forgive this failure in me," I cried, "heartily ashamed of myself as I am. A little patience, and I shall hope to prove myself worthy of so noble, so courageous a companion as you. I should not have suspected so much weakness in me. I cannot believe it a part of my nature. I have been unduly, most heavily tried. But so have you!" I exclaimed, finding more strength coming to me out of the clear serene beauty of her eyes than any cordial could have inspired. "Oh, we will make it well for both of us yet."

I sprang to my feet with a shake of my body that was like flinging away the whole miserable girlishness in me to the winds.

"Nay," she exclaimed, "keep your seat. I will sit by your side. We are not separated yet, Mr. Musgrave. I swear," she cried, lifting her eyes to heaven, "I would rather that this should have happened than that we should have had to endure another week of the horrible life we were leading in that cruel ship. We are not separated; but who knows that another

week might not have found us so—might not have found me alone?" She shuddered almost convulsively, then instantly rallying with an effort of will that was a miracle in its way for the energy of it, she added, in a changed, softened voice full of sympathetic sweetness and the melody of her tones, "How refreshing is the shadow of these trees! how soothing this stillness! We shall be able presently to think what is next and best to be done. Let us meanwhile wait and see what they intend to do," pointing to the brig.

CHAPTER VII.

WE VIEW THE ISLAND.

The boat, creeping along the water with a spark of light to the rise of the oars on either hand of her flashing out as regularly as a revolving lantern, regained the brig, and in a few moments the little fabric mounted jerkingly to the davits ; then round swung the topsail-yard, the royals mounted slowly to a taut leech, stay-sails were run aloft, and as the brig gathered way she fell off a point or two with her head to the east of south, the sea opening beyond her to the clear horizon, that just past the vessel's stern ran with a sort of *seething* of its blue into the hot and tingling glory that came in a blinding shiver from the edge of the ocean there to the very feathering of the surf upon the southward-facing beach of the island.

We watched the vessel receding from us in silence ; fathom by fathom she crept seawards, with her canvas trembling amid the swimming sultrinesss of the atmosphere, and a short polished tape as of shot satin dragging in tow of her rudder.

"Distance makes her beautiful," exclaimed Miss Grant, "but she has proved a most ugly ship to us."

"What do they mean to do with her, I wonder?" said I, watching the flickering of her high sails as she drew along a slope of the shore whose shoulder would in a moment or two conceal her.

"What do you suppose?" she asked.

"As they have two good boats," said I, "they will probably scuttle the vessel when within convenient reach of some habitable place. It is clear that they know their whereabouts ; and as Mole can use the log-line, the chart will give him the rest of the information he needs. They'll arrive ashore, or be picked up as shipwrecked mariners, earn a deal of pity, pocket some dollars in addition to what they may plunder from Broadwater's and the mate's

cabins, then scatter and never more be heard of. There! She has vanished!" I cried, rising.

I turned to survey the island. It was partly coarse, thick guinea grass, and partly soft, glittering, dusty sand where we were, with a group of trees winding to the place to which the sailor had dragged our luggage out of a line of palms marshalled for the space of a couple of hundred steps along the shore of the creek, with others opposite, both bending their ostrich-like plumes to a combining of their boughs that formed a little cool green tunnel under which the bright shoaling water ran darkling, though it sparkled out green as emerald in the opening beyond, with a rounding at the extremity like the end of a thumb, where the white sand came down to it. The land went in a slight rise to a grove of trees that was almost a little forest in its way, with a twilight amid the greenery, spiked by hazy beams of sunshine striking down any opening the light could shoot through. Here and there a great red toadstool showed like a small scarlet shield in the herbage. There was a clump of cocoa-nut trees standing isolated to the left of

the grove. The white and flowing-like streams of quicksilver wound in paths through the grass in all directions, and made one wonder that the tropical vegetation one saw could take root and find nurture in such soil. The air, blowing softly from the south-west, was tremulous with the humming of many kinds of insects, and sweet with indefinable perfumes as of convolvuli and the passion-flower—a commingling of nameless aromas. I watched a frigate-bird come out from the mere black spot he made seawards, and glance like an arrow without stir of its wide and graceful pinions to some haunt of its own past the little inland forest. In places close beside us the long grass stirred, as though there were human fingers beneath, to the movement of a lizard perhaps green as a bottle, with eyes like rubies, and a flickering fork of tongue as if it was breathing fire; or maybe some dingy thing that might have been a land-crab could be made out creeping for a space through the fibres of the grass, and then falling motionless as though, mole-like, it had sunk deep out of sight.

"I hope there is nothing poisonous in the

way of snakes hereabouts," said I, pulling out a stout stick from one of the bundles that lay strapped near a portmanteau, and very warily I strode into the thick of the herbage, beating right and left, keeping a bright look-out, and listening intently. I started nothing but a lizard or two, and one of those half-lobsters called *soldiers*, and a vast spider with a body as big as a crown-piece, magnificently marked like the leopard, with the hues so brilliant and shining that it was as good as beholding some marvellously-wrought mechanism glorious with jewels to watch the scamper of the thing with its long legs over the heads of the spears of grass that bent to its weight. I returned, and opening my portmanteau, pulled out the pistols which lay there loaded, and thrust them into my pockets.

"I'll go and take a view of the scene," said I; "there may be land in sight away west from the tallest of those hummocks. This island must form one of the Bahama group certainly, and if so, others cannot be very remote, though hidden from this elevation. Will you remain here until I return?"

"No, I will accompany you," she answered; "there's nothing to be afraid of, yet I do not like the idea of being alone." She sent a swift glance round her with a faint smile that was like asking forgiveness for this little show of weakness.

The length of her dress made me feel a trifle uneasy. It was impossible to know what small murderous fangs lay hidden among the long coarse grass that showed yellow and bald in places to the roasting eye of the sun. The folds of her gown formed such a flowing drapery that the skirts of it trailed a foot or two in her wake—a regular net for the ensnaring of anything venomous or distracting. Let her courage be what it would, methought if she should hook up such a spider as the chap I had just put to flight, it might go hard with us both. It was no time for ceremony. It is simply impossible for a man to be marooned with a girl without the vessel that makes castaways of them carrying off a mass of the superfluous decorums which on shipboard kept them at arm's length.

"Miss Grant," said I, "excuse me—your dress is too long."

She gathered the folds of it in her hand, and said simply, "Yes, much too long;" then going to one of her trunks she produced after some fumbling—a pincushion!—(to think, now, of a pincushion on an uninhabited island!)—and handing it to me, bade me help to pin her dress up for her. It was a task in its way to reconcile one almost to being marooned—for the moment, at least. I don't think I had known how perilously emotional this woman had made me at heart in all thoughts that had reference to her, until I put my hand to the sweet and careless intimacy of this pinning job. It was a sort of haunting of her closest presence whilst it lasted, like bending the face to a flower that one has long been able to admire with the eye only. She watched me with a half-smile as I stooped round her, whilst I trimmed her canvas suitably to the best of my judgment for our adventure; with an air of unaffected indifference touched but very subtly with the most delicate imaginable spirit of

coquetry. It was more like a flirting passage, indeed, in some merry picnicing jaunt—as though we two had strolled from the rest of the people, and I was clumsily trying to make good the dilapidations following an airy frolic —than a detail of one of the grimmest of all ocean incidents. She again explored the box she had recently rummaged, and took from it the silver-mounted pistol which she had shown to me on board the brig, and after deliberating a minute or two thrust the barrel into the bosom of her dress.

"I will carry it for you," said I, with a small recoil from the recklessness with which she had slided the loaded weapon aslant her beautiful figure. "Should you stumble—let me hold it for you."

She withdrew it, saying, "I must be armed as well as you. I shall know how to carry it." With that she opened another trunk, and after a brief hunt drew forth a dainty leathern belt of South American make and fashion, into which, after clasping it loosely round her, she stuck the pistol, where it lay safe enough, and ready to her hand besides; and then

equipping ourselves with a cotton umbrella apiece, we started for the green hummock that rose at about half a mile inland, taking a bit of a circuit to the left so as to go clear of the trees, into whose cathedral-like dimness it was difficult to peer without uncomfortable fancies of savage things—imaginations of bright hungry eyes glistening between some mighty spikes of aloes; the small head of a serpent half-way up a tree, with fold swelling upon fold of spotted, bloated skin, rising corkscrew-fashion to the green intricacies atop—all helped, as such notions would be, by the novel tropical smell of flower and gum in the wind, and the innumerable murmur of flies and insects skirring across the sight on wings of translucent pearl, and the melancholy, unmusical pipings of birds, one wailing to another and waiting for the answer, as it seemed.

We stepped along very cautiously, Miss Grant looking down for the most part, and I round about. The greenery soothed the eye, but there was a savageness put into everything you saw by the loneliness of the place that weighed perilously upon the spirits. For my

part, I felt as though the sand we trod had never before received the impress of a human foot, and there were moments during that walk when the helplessness and hopelessness of our condition affected me so violently that I could scarce draw a breath, and I had to call a halt, feigning, with my hand to my brow, that I had paused only to obtain a better view of the island.

From the summit of the hummock we could see all around us. The sea went in a brilliant blue slope to the sky, the great dome of which, brassy with the glory of the sun that was but a little past the meridian, set you thinking of some mighty, brightly-burnished copper-bell charged with fiery splendour shutting down over you, with this green spot of earth parching in the midst of it to the roasting metallic glare. A little leaning shaft of white, with an ice-like gleam upon it, broke the continuity of the southern seaboard. It was the canvas of the brig. From *her* right round to back again to her the clear horizon ran without a flaw. If land were visible from the cross-trees of the Iron Crown, it was

concealed from us here. The little forest betwixt us and the creek hid the foreshore of the island past it; but one knew how it would be there by how it was wherever else the eye turned. The surf rimmed the white sands with three or four lines of flashing snow, which seemed to melt into the coral beach like liquid light, and the seething of it fell as delicately upon the ear as the hissing of champagne in a glass poised to the lips.

"It is all clear sea, apparently," said I; "the blue seems to me to spread everywhere the same. There is some chance for us in that, for in such soundings there can be no danger to navigation, and a vessel may heave close enough into view to perceive our signals at any hour."

"We should have some signals ready," said Miss Grant.

"Nothing to catch the eye like smoke," said I; "I will build a big bonfire up here this afternoon, ready to make a blaze when the time comes."

"The island is certainly uninhabited," she said, exploring it with her dark eyes. "It is

hard to imagine that it has ever been *discovered;* but it is best as it is, Mr. Musgrave. Surely the very worst shipwrecks are those in which sailors and passengers have been thrown amongst savages."

"It is blisteringly hot up here," said I; "let us return to the cool of the trees. A moment though! You have a keen sight. Can you distinguish anywhere upon this island the least gleam of water?"

She searched slowly and narrowly, as did I for the matter of that. Again and again I was deceived by some thin sinuous streak of sand that had the very sheen of a limpid stream in the dazzle of it, as it seemed to creep like some little brook amid the herbage of the denser growths; but my eye could regularly follow it to broader tracks which were unmistakably sand to the sight; and I was about to give up, when Miss Grant, who had been looking steadfastly in one direction for some minutes, said, "*That* must be a little waterfall yonder, Mr. Musgrave; look past the curve there, over the head of that clump of bushes."

She pointed to the foot of the slope of another

hummock, lower and smaller than the one on whose brow we stood, and in a breath I caught the sparkle of a waterfall shivering like splinters of bright steel against the green edge of the rise, and amidst the interlacery of the bush whose density a little lower down hid it. If it were fresh water it was of the first consequence in the world to us, and without another word we started for it. It proved as thirsty, bubbling, and murmuring a brook as ever lipped glass-like to an English river. Its source was some distance away; it flowed freshly in a channel of its own, fretting to the spot at which we had arrived, when it sulked again in a wide pool, passing on afresh in a mimic torrent, narrowing for a space till its volume made a foam of it, then running clear under the sky for twenty fathoms, after which it pierced the herbage and vanished amidst the trees. I scooped up some with my hand and tasted it. New milk was never sweeter. I had a brandy-flask in my pocket, and with the help of the silver cup attached to it we drank our fill of this delicious water. No wine was ever so well tasted; it was ice-cold too,

and of so diamond-like a clearness, that but for the whispers of it as it ran, and the hue of the blue sky in it, it would have been as invisible as water in a crystal vase. Short of the appearance of a ship promising deliverance to us, nothing, I am persuaded, could have so helped my spirits as the discovery of this fresh water. There was thirst in the dry and blinding sparkling of the sand; there was thirst in the aspect of the tracks of rusty yellow herbage which dashed the vegetation with their sickly tint like gangrenes spreading even to the gaze of the eye; there was thirst in the hot air that everywhere trembled like the atmosphere over a flame, until in places the horizon waved as though a high swell were running out there, and the slender trunks of the cocoa-nut trees wound upon the sight with the movement of an archimedean screw slowly revolving. Here then were inspirations to make the discovery of this brook of running waters a positive rapture in its way. Suppose it had no existence, I thought; what should we have done? The beakers the men had dispatched us with held but a few gallons. Rain-water might have been found

perhaps by digging in the sand, but I had my doubts of that when I came to look at the dust of the milk-white foreshore. The mere fancy of our condition without this brook—the central roasting Eye sending an atmosphere of brass flowing to the furthest confines—the thirsty, *salt* noise of the surf—(you could *hear* the saltness of it in the seethe of each little recoiling breaker)—was almost enough to make one keep one's hot lips steeped in the crystal coolness and sweetness of the prattling stream.

But my heart fell again as we walked slowly towards the spot where our luggage was. Indeed, the mere sight of these details of civilization—portmanteaux, trunks of the latest fashion, rugs, camp-stools, walking-sticks, the twenty odds and ends which had gone to our equipment—made such a contrast of the inhospitable desolation of the spot of land on which we were imprisoned, that the stoutest spirit must have yielded, I think, to a feeling of hopelessness. How were we to obtain a shelter for the night? When our slender store of provisions gave out, where were we to look for a further stock? Again, unless we were

taken off by some passing ship, what was our chance of escape? There was no lack of wood on the island, and with tools I might have contrived to put together some sort of log-fabric on which, under Heaven, we might have made shift to blow away to within reach of succour, whether of land or of ship; but without chopper or saw yonder grove was of no more use to us than a handful of the white sand by the creek there. However, it was a little soon for lamentation, though on such an occasion as this a man's groans would be deepest when his experiences were freshest.

"It is about time we broke our fast," said I; "perhaps we should feel faint had we nothing to think about but our appetites. The men were merciful to send our luggage ashore with us. Those camp-stools of yours are worth a million."

I opened one of the cases containing our provisions, and prepared a meal of preserved meat and biscuit, along with the remainder of a bottle of Madeira. The camp-stools made us seats, and our table was the lid of a trunk. Of all the passages of this particular nautical experience of my life, our first meal on this little nameless

island recurs to me the most vividly. I think I hear now the hum of the sultry sea-breeze amid the boughs overhead, rendered refreshing to the ear by the metallic-like rustling of leaves, yet always blowing vibratory with the innumerable buzzings of flies and insects. I see again the green lizard, scarcely distinguishable from the foliage amongst which he lurked, viewing us with brilliant eyes from some limb on high. Occasionally there would come a harsh, short scream from a paroquet, and a flash of lustrous plumage from one verdant shadow to another, like a fragment of rainbow borne along by the wind, accompanied by the sharp rushing *skirr* of beating pinions. The sunshine was alive with the glancing forms of coloured things—now a great dragon-fly, a golden shaft propelled by wings of gossamer—now a butterfly of glorious hue—now some tiny red-breasted bird, a sort of woodpecker, maybe, for I noticed that a drumming as of bills would spring up out of the quarter in which the streak of radiant feathers had vanished. Had all been well with us, good beds to look forward to at night, with even such necessaries to support us as a back-

wood settlement might supply, why, this little island, with my beautiful and courageous companion to talk to and have by my side would have been something—say even for a fortnight—to have entered into the realities of life as a sort of paradisiacal dream, a fancy for whose brief fulfilment under happy conditions I would barter a dozen years of the delights of the gayest and most showy cities of Europe. But 'twas sheer nightmare and nothing more, spite of the waving verdure of the savanna, of the glitter of the tropic bird, of flowers lovely as the constellations of the midnight of the Antilles, of the rain-like pattering of the leaves of the palm-tree, of odours as of the lime and the citron, when one sent one's gaze seawards, and *felt* the whole solitude of the mighty deep melting through and through into one in a kind of swoon, as it seemed, of the very soul.

However, we ate and drank, and were the better for it. I lighted a cheroot, and fell a-thinking with my eyes on Miss Grant. She was equally thoughtful, with a far-away expression in her face.

"There are nervous folks," said I, "who

would not accept the gift of looking ahead even for a fortnight if they could make their fortunes through it. Throw me back a couple of months ago into Piccadilly, with leave to peer far enough to divine old Broadwater's nature, and to guess at the issues it must shape, and we should not be here."

"It is all my fault," said she.

"Mine!" I exclaimed. "I should have insisted on being put ashore with you in the English Channel."

"I mean it is my fault that you ever made the voyage," said she.

"You would not wish to be alone though?" said I, smiling.

She shook her head with an unaffected shudder.

"What conclusions will Alexander arrive at," said I, "when day after day goes by, and no Iron Crown arrives at Rio?"

"I don't like to think of it," she answered; "but he will have to be patient. He must wait as *I* must wait."

"Pity it is not the other way about," said I. "*He* ought to be here, and you safe at Rio."

She looked at me quickly, with a half-formed fancy, as it seemed, hovering on her lips, parted as if to speak, faintly coloured, and plucking a blade of the coarse grass at her side, appeared to study the texture of it.

"Alexander will conclude that the brig has gone down with all hands," I continued. "The men are sure to scuttle her, and as they know if rescued they will have to account for us and the two men they have made away with—Broadwater and Bothwell I mean—it is odds if they don't invent the name of the ship they profess to have belonged to, so that the truth will never reach my cousin until we carry the news ourselves to him."

"Poor boy! his anxiety will be cruel. But perhaps we shall be with him sooner than we expect."

"I hope so, indeed, for your sake," said I, with a lift of my brows to the tormenting puzzlement of how it was to be done. "But sufficient unto the day, Miss Grant. Here are we *marooned*, and what's next to do? that's the question. No chance of our being taken off this afternoon, nor of our escaping in any other

way. The night then is before us, and we must provide for it. I have no means of erecting any sort of shelter, and the island offers nothing. For my part, one of those rugs and a stretch of that dry sand will make me as good a couch as I need, spite of the land-crab and whatever else crawls hereabouts at night. But the notion of *your* lying on the cold ground is intolerable to me," said I, turning my eyes about in vain search of any hint for a high and dry bed for her in tree or slope.

"I have a net-hammock in one of those boxes," she exclaimed, "unhappily only one. If you——"

"*I!* Lord love you, Miss Grant! Why, if it were not for the lizards aloft, I'd seize myself to a bough, make a bed of one of those leafy forks up there, as Robinson Crusoe did. But there may be monkeys in this island for aught I know, and on the whole I fancy a sand-mattress promises me a quieter couch than a tree. If you can find the hammock, we will turn to and rig it up in as snug a place as we can light on."

She immediately explored one of her boxes, and presently found the hammock. It was

formed of net, but very strong, though so portable that one could have stowed it away in one's hat, with ship-shape clews and eyes and lengths of laniard ready spliced for lashings. This, it seems, like her pistol, her belt, and divers other matters, had been one of her Rio possessions. It was an odd thing to carry home from South America to the English climate ; but it was an old home relic, she told me, in which she had passed many a long slumbrous hour under the scented and myriad-voiced shade of the cotton-trees, of the gleaming leaves of the star-apple, and the slender branches bending to the weight of the golden shaddock. Besides, she knew little of Great Britain, and might have believed that the sun was as constant to the garden plains and smoking cities of the greatest maritime nation on the face of the earth, as it was to the country in which she had been bred. But a spell of the Edgeware Road would suffice to correct even odder fancies than *that*.

I swung the hammock between two trees which exactly fitted the length of it. They stood somewhat forward from the group where our boxes were, with a tract of white sand

hard by, which I had resolved should furnish me with a bed that night; so that she would swing close over me, and be as free likewise as one could possibly contrive it, from all risks of visits during the dark hours from the lizards and tree-toads in which I reckoned this island abounded. I formed a mattress and pillow for her of shawls and rugs, and learning that she had some mosquito-curtains in her boxes, I borrowed a roll of white tape from her, wanting a better kind of line, and made a ridge-rope of it along her hammock, with a couple of pieces of wood cut from the bough of a tree to serve as stanchions, that the ends of the curtain might float fair past the clews, and so protect her at both ends.

"Perhaps there are no mosquitoes," said she, watching me as I worked.

"I hope not," said I doubtfully; "anyhow I shall borrow one of your curtains, and roll myself up in it when the time comes. Unless my system has undergone a change since I was at Bombay, a mosquito-bite with me signifies a lump rather larger than a crow's egg, and as red as Broadwater's nose."

"We have plenty of them at Rio," said she, "but they never tease me. Though the species may be different here," she added, with a glance at the contrivance I had rigged up, which made me fancy that, bad as our melancholy and dreadful situation was, there would be nothing in it to hinder her from objecting to the defacement of her fair face by the singing pests of these rich and sparkling parallels.

I now found that occupation of any kind was helpful to my spirits, and thereupon pulling off my coat and waistcoat, and baring my arms, I went to work with a tolerably stout knife I happened to have in my pocket—one of those useful combinations of corkscrew, gimlet, finger-long saw, and the like—to cut as much dried stuff as I could make shift to deal with; of which I manufactured faggots by securing them with ligatures of grass strong enough to knot. Miss Grant insisted on helping me. She had replaced the somewhat small-brimmed hat she had come ashore in with a great yellow sombrero-fashioned head-covering that sheltered her like an umbrella, and I see her now bending her graceful figure to the faggot at her feet,

her white hands, with a flashing ring or two upon them, nimbly and swiftly knotting the grass bindings, lifting her face occasionally to address me, with her dark eyes the brighter, her teeth the whiter, her complexion the fairer, for the softness of the shadow which lay upon her beauty. We manufactured a great number of these faggots, and conveyed the whole of them between us in several journeys to the summit of the hummock, where we built them up in a goodly pile, taking care to fence them about, that they should not be blown away by a sudden squall or rising of wind, and further protecting the whole by a thick cover of live branches, densely leaved, which would also thicken the smoke whenever the time came for us to set fire to the heap. The great heat made this labour very arduous, but though its completion left us both wearied, it was a thing to be done, and we felt the easier in our minds when it was finished. It was impossible to know but that at any hour we might happen to look seawards and spy a vessel slipping fleetly past, too far off to witness any waving signal of shawl or handkerchief, but well within view

of such a volume of smoke as our body of faggots would make.

We paused a moment on the brow of the little elevation, before returning from our last excursion to the hummock, to take a long look round. The sun was sinking in the cloudless western heavens; he was a great shield of fast reddening fire, and the placid purple ocean beneath him seemed to rise with a rounding of its polished bosom to the huge luminary, as though he were some mighty magnet up there drawing it. One could not look a moment, without a weeping of the sight, into the blinding ardency of the western atmosphere, so charged was it with the ceaseless gushing of the crimson glory; it seemed to palpitate and contract and dilate like a lake of liquid glowing iron newly poured from the heart of a blast-furnace. But the sea went from there into a tender deepening of turquoise against the orange reflection in which the eastern sky was bathed; the rippling of it was so exceedingly delicate, that it looked more like the shimmering of light upon it than the fine wrinklings of the wind; the thin edge of surf broke with a

tincture of lemon upon the sands, that now shone golden to the evening radiance. The air blew very gentle and warm. The tropic picture was deepened to every sense by the strange uncommon sounds rising from the island—queer chirpings and snorings; sharp, short cries from the greenery, like women's voices calling hoarsely; brief melancholy pipings making answer to like notes, sad, low, and more distant. The sound of the surf seethed through this curious concert, but nothing moved, look where one would, if it were not the flash of a bird of gorgeous plumage, a stir of some near tall spears of grass, or the curled head of a palm slightly swayed by the wind into a beckoning posture or an airy salutation. There was a quality in the light of the waning day that put a melancholy into the spirit of the solitude of this place far beyond the reach of moonlight or the starry darkness of the night. Fresh as we were from days and days of the loneliness and immensity of the deep, yet there was something in the boundless aspect of the ocean, as we surveyed it from the height of that hum-

mock, which, speaking for myself, shocked and scared one's instincts as though one gazed at some preternatural revelation of sea. I saw Miss Grant droop in her posture, so to speak, to the sight of it; her clasped fingers holding her hands before her relaxed, her arms fell to her side, her head sank as she slowly brought her eyes from the flawless ocean to my face. She breathed slow and deep, as one in whom perception has grown to the weight of a burthen upon the heart.

"Come," said I, taking her gently by the hand, "there is a morrow, and yet a morrow, before us. The good God is over all besides."

We walked quietly, but in silence, back to the spot where we meant to pass the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MIDNIGHT BELL.

The clear, fine, spangled dusk speedily followed the setting of the sun. The night lay dark upon the sea before we had finished the meal to which we had sat down when the hot crimson of the luminary was still flushing the heavens to the zenith with a blood-red atmosphere, against which the trees behind us on the west side of the island showed out black and lovely with the effect of the rich light between the boughs and the leaves, as though some hand had studded every interstice with a red-hot ember. The discordant cry of the parrot ceased, the multitudinous buzzing that had been going on all day came to an end, the melancholy wailing whistlings that had been answering one another down to sunset were hushed as if by magic as the last

of the brief twilight glimmered off the sky. It was now the cricket's opportunity, and from every part of the island there rose up a very storm of bell-like chirruping, mingled with the sultry horns of the sailing beetles, odd whistlings and strange groanings coming from heaven knows where, along with the confused croaking of reptiles and the wild *snoring* call of the tree-toad. Here and there upon the darkness, in small hovering constellations, appeared a swarm of fire-flies. In places, these little galaxies of yellow-greenish points of light seemed to combine with the dust of the stars beyond them, and the eye catching them on a sudden would be startled for the moment by the fancy of some astral dance up there in the dark blue obscure, as though a fragment of the milky way had parted from the main body and was making a night on't!

The sea-breeze blew languidly, cool with dew, and fragrant with borrowings from the moist vegetation it breathed over as it floated down to our part of the island from the south and east. The wash of the light and lipping surf right around was as soft as the voice of a child;

the sea spread out black as ink from the ivory of the beach, touched at wide intervals with the gleam of phosphorus or the silver wire-like wake, tremulously riding the ripples, dropped by some particular bright star. The moon would be rising anon, and we waited for her coming; for the dusk, clear as it was, rendered movement uninviting and even menacing. In fact it was impossible to tell what creeping thing might squirm to the tread in the darkness that blackened nearly everything but the sand. We had not, it is true, observed the least hint of snakes about throughout the day, but if any there were, the night might tempt them forth to walk. The puff-adder loves to stalk in gloom, and the rattlesnake's delight is the forest shadow. That we might not give anything poisonous a chance, we planted our camp-stools in the centre of the broad tract of sand that flowed fan-shaped to the creek betwixt the herbage, where even to the starlight it glanced out clear as a ship's deck, so that anything that stirred upon it we should instantly perceive.

Happily for me I had a good store of cheroots

in my portmanteau. The fragrance of the tobacco seemed to civilize the island.

"Even with a companion by one's side," said Miss Grant, speaking softly, "the loneliness, now that the dark has come, of such an ocean spot as this terribly oppresses the spirit. But to be alone—without hope of escape, without the means perhaps of prolonging life beyond a little while—oh, Mr. Musgrave, there are some forms of human suffering of which the world can never know anything!"

"I should go mad if I were left alone in a place like this, after a bit," said I; "imagination would prove too much for me. Even when all's well I find myself ill-trimmed in that way. But to be alone here, without a chance, as you say, of escaping—I protest I would not give myself long to witness shapes as wild as ever the sailors of Columbus dreamt of, stalking out of the blackness of that grove yonder; to behold grotesque forms sliding out of the gloom of the sea into the gleam of the surf to have a look at me; to hear airy voices syllabling my name—well, fancy does make horrid fools of us certainly!"

It might have been the chill of the dew in the dark sea-breeze that blew with a little moan past us just then that sent a chill through me, but I must own to being possessed by a wild fit of dejection at that moment also. It did not linger; it was like one of those giddinesses which come and go, but which whilst on you make you grip anything for support with your eyes shut. Doubtless it came to me out of the boundless surface of liquid blackness broadening out to the low stars. I could not see how we were to get away from this island, and the briefest mental look ahead shrunk up the very soul in one to the prospect of days passing into weeks, weeks into months, with God knows *what* in the far end for some newly-arrived people *then* to stumble upon as a memorial of nameless human suffering.

Presently the moon arose, throwing up a delicate rosy haze first, then mounting into it red as a rose, which changed into greenish silver after a brief climb, with an icy sparkling upon the sea-line just under her, as though the edge of the ocean there were a long single breaker arching over into foam.

"What is that?" suddenly exclaimed Miss Grant, pointing to the sandy spit that formed a shoulder of the creek.

In the gathering light of the moon it might have passed for a circular mahogany dining-table that had been stranded by the tide, and that having felt its legs had started on an excursion inland. I was exceedingly puzzled, and as I could now see to walk, I approached the black object full of curiosity and wonder; but it was not till I was within ten yards of it that I made it out a vast turtle, weighing, I dare say, four or five hundred pounds. I knew very little of the habits of these animals, but I had somewhere read that the creatures are easily frightened, and so returning to Miss Grant I told her quietly what the thing was. "It will have come to lay its eggs, I dare say," said I; "I have often handled a turtle's egg, but never tasted one. I believe they are very good eating. Let the thing by all means contribute to our stock of provisions. Since there is one there will be others, and if I can manage to turn one of them over,

I will; though how to get steaks and soups out of her I'm sure I don't know, unless we can rig up some sort of an oven; but even then what are we to boil the meat in?"

"We shall be very poor creatures indeed, Mr. Musgrave," said she, "if we cannot overcome difficulties of that kind. The one problem is how to get away from the island. We *cannot* stay here, you know."

The black figure of the turtle crawling steadfastly along the sand, like some gigantic spider from which a mischievous boy has cut off all but a little bit of its legs, slided behind the tall grass and disappeared, but I marked which way she went, for I meant to have her eggs if she laid any. The moonshine on the water was now glorious, and came rippling in pure silver to the very wash of the surf; the trees rose pale, and the foliage trembled to the breeze with the sheeny glitter of the South African silver-leaf. Our shadows lay black as sketches in India ink upon the coral sand. Oh! there was wonder, there was beauty, but there was terror too in the marvellous gush of haze which swept smoke-

like from the bland planet eclipsing the stars in her vicinity. Distance grew horribly infinite to it, and the sense of isolation a physical torment.

"If the ruffians had but spared us a boat!" I cried. "We could have provisioned and watered her for days and days, and sailed in her too without risk on yonder equinoctial surface. There is nothing for it but to wait, Miss Grant. This is a great sea, steep to our foreshore, or I am much mistaken. The island is bound to be in some kind of highway, and to-morrow, pray God, may give us the sight of a ship."

With this kind of talk we killed some time. The light of the mounting moon was so brilliantly clear that I could witness every varying expression in my companion's face as plainly as if a shining dawn had broken; only that the moonlight gave a spirituality to her beauty which her charms were perhaps the richer for not discovering by sunlight. When the time arrived for me to press her to seek rest, I found her reluctant. And small wonder! It was not that the hammock

was uninviting. Indeed, nothing fitter could have been devised for the languid, dewy warmth of such a tropical night of pale gold-like splendour as this, than the airy couch that spanned the black pillars of the two silent trees. One thought of what was up *above !*—some scaly betailed thing, creeping down the dry bark with a clawing of its armoured feet like the pattering of a land-crab upon an uncarpeted floor, to awaken one by a cold pressure of its belly upon one's brow—pah ! The tropics are a glorious region to read about, to be sure ; but give me an English summer evening dying out—with the lowing of a cow or two, the chime of a distant church-bell, a drowsy chirp stealing from the shadow of some sweet-blossomed orchard—into the delicious repose of night, unbroken by a note louder than the dim *cheep* of the grasshopper, or the faint midnight crow of an uneasy cock. Why here, now, as we sat, if we paused in our speech for a moment, the ear carried even engrossing thought away to the rickety chorusing of the million crickets ; winged things as prickly as a cork stuck over

with needle-points would sail into one's cheek with a *hum* that was like a little trumpet-blast in its way, so near and sudden was the sound of it; the snore of the tree-toad too awakened an echo as of an innumerable croaking of frogs; and if ever this sultry and unwholesome concert sank a little, it was only, as it seemed to me, to give one a chance of catching more distinctly the thin, red-hot-wire-like singing of a mosquito hard by the ear. The fireflies were wonderfully plentiful. A little cloud of them hovered for nearly ten minutes in front of us, within arm's reach almost; and bright as the moonlit air was, they glittered so sharp and clear, that I believe had the night been dark they would have shed illumination enough to enable us to have seen each other's face by.

Finding Miss Grant reluctant to go to her hammock, I proposed a little stroll along the glittering beach, and for over an hour, I think, did we measure to and fro some quarter of a mile of the sparkling shore, pausing often to watch the curl of the little breaker, arching black against the moon an instant ere seeth-

ing into foam, or to direct a searching eye seawards for any inky spot upon the tremulous stream of brilliance, or any pallid shadow in the deep blue obscure on either hand of the showering moonlight, or to listen to some few brief, flute-like notes breaking from the inshore forest, or to mark a meteor of magnificence hurling westwards comet-like, and leaving a white, steam-coloured scar upon the sky long after it had burst into spangles and vanished.

At last she consented to "turn in." I dragged a trunk to the hammock to enable her to step to her swinging bed, and when her head was pillowed I made her snug with a shawl, and then enveloped her in the floating gauze of the mosquito-net, through which I could see her dark eyes watching me. The spreading branches of the trees screened her from the moon, but here and there a ray fell through, and one white beam rested upon the hammock. I doubt if any dream that ever sweetened man's rest was more enchanting than the vision of this girl's face under the moonlit, gauze-like transparency. Though no vision, indeed, yet it affected me as with the unreality of one.

I could see a smile in her eyes as I raised my hat with a little bow, and wished her good-night. One must go to sea for such experiences as this. Name me such a conjuncture ashore as could produce it. When I stole a peep at her again, the moonbeam had slipped off her, and the hammock was in gloom.

"I hope nothing will tease you on the sand," I heard her say.

"I hope not," I answered, looking at the branches overhead to make sure that the coast was clear up there.

I had now to make my own bed. The boxes were of unequal height, or I should have stowed them together into a couch. I stretched out a rug to lie upon, brought a small carpet-bag to the head of it to serve as a pillow, drew a mosquito-curtain over me, and lay down, pistols in pocket within ready grasp, and covered myself with such another rug as I rested on. The dry sand yielded with a sort of spring in it, and I found it a very tolerable mattress. But I lay extremely uneasy in my mind however for some time, constantly imagining that something was stirring on one

side or the other of me. But I was more wearied than I was sensible of, and presently felt a pleasing sense of drowsiness stealing over me. There was something now almost soothing to the ear in the myriad chirpings of the crickets, and in the subdued soft creaming of the surf. Just over my face hovered a swarm of fire-flies, and I watched them sleepily. The night wind sighing through the trees filled the air with a fountain-like murmuring of rustling leaves.

I was nearly asleep when I started, instantly broad awake, to a peculiar, melodious, but most melancholy whistling of a bird amid the branches of the tree to whose trunk the head of Miss Grant's hammock was attached. What sort of bird it was I cannot say. Maybe it was one of the species which induced Columbus to believe that there were nightingales in these islands, when he sat hearkening at sunset to the gush of melodies which came floating out of the foliage to mingle with the *Salves* and *Aves* and the litanies of his crew. The few rich flute-like notes were plaintive beyond expression. Aroused as I was from my first

noddings, it took a little thinking to collect the quarter whence the piping flowed, and what it was that made it. Indeed, to open one's eyes at all upon the bright moonlight, the white sand, the froth of surf, the ocean washing out black from the steel-like sparkling under the luminary, was surprise enough after long weeks of waking up to nothing but my coffee-coloured cabin in the Iron Crown, specially when the whole was blended into a sort of mist-like dimness by the fold of mosquito-curtain through which I peered. Indeed, if the sad musical pipings from the boughs overhead had come instead from some creamy-bosomed sea-nymph glimmering out white as ivory waist high past the foam that was shaling upon the sand, the sight must have occupied some little time in filling me with astonishment, so magic and unreal did the bird's awakening of me make me find the scene; so likely a theatre did the island seem for the wizardry of the deep, and so qualified was my mind at the instant for the contemplation, without wonder, of astonishments.

But the song was brief, and after a little my

mind came round to its old bearings, and being now wide awake, after a glance at the hammock, which I observed to hang stirless in the gloom, I fell to some practical, anxious considerations of our condition; and the current of thought being set a-flowing ran into twenty different channels. I recalled my first meeting with Miss Grant, my instinctive hesitation in undertaking to escort her, the bewilderment her beauty had raised in me, and how, as I believed, nothing but the tender unconscious pleading of it could have triumphed over my reluctance to embark on this adventure. Then I mused upon the tragic and distracting incidents of the voyage, and my lonely quarter-deck walks with my lovely companion. I dared not deny to my own heart that I was already perilously fond of her. Indeed, had my reason been half imbecile it must have guessed at a growth of passion in me by a trick of meditating and endeavouring to interpret the meaning of her behaviour and looks as I could recollect them after passages of conversation and prolonged association. 'Twas a time for such a reverie as this, believe me, with her fair and

stately figure airily resting within hail of a whisper from me, and the sweep of the silent sea round about closing as if to combine us. By Heaven! I thought to myself, though I know my duty, yet should a time ever come when I must hand her over to my cousin, it will be a bitter parting for me. Fool that I was to mix my heart up in a business in which I had no concern! If the forfeiture of her companionship is to be the condition of our escape, will my growing emotion presently leave me with disposition enough to lift so much as a finger to procure our deliverance?

"Tut!" thought I, with a waft of the mosquito-net at a little dance of fire-flies hovering over my knees, "it is about time I went to sleep!"

I had scarcely got my head down on the carpet-bag afresh when I was indescribably astonished by hearing *the chimes of a bell* rung swiftly. I listened breathlessly for an instant, believing the notes to be an illusion of my senses, but it was impossible to mistake. No village church belfry on a Sunday morning ever echoed a clearer summons to the faithful.

The ringing suggested the sort of agitation you notice in the quick, eager pealing of a steamer's bell rung as a final warning to passengers to step ashore. It continued without cessation. I sat up, then clearing myself of the mosquito-net, leapt to my feet. I saw Miss Grant sitting erect in her hammock.

"Oh, Mr. Musgrave, what is that?" she cried.

"It will be some vessel," I exclaimed, "close aboard the island; perhaps ashore."

"No; it comes from those trees yonder," pointing to the little forest.

She threw the net like a veil off her head, sprang from the hammock to the box, and thence to the ground. "Oh!" she exclaimed, seizing my arm, "what *can* it be?"

The bell was no longer ringing rapidly; a sexton might now be tolling it. The slow, punctually-recurring chimes came along like a knell; they then ceased, and all was still. I paused a little to make sure if possible of the direction whence the sounds proceeded. On a sudden the ringing started off afresh—such a reckless, rushing, clattering of noise that my

conviction was there was a madman at large upon the island, and that this was his way of killing the midnight hours! The whole place seemed distracted by the clamour. Queer grunts rose out of the grass, hard snoring noises out of the trees, with a universal groaning of frogs far and near, the hoarse inquiring cries of parrots, whilst you caught a shriller edge in the shrill minstrelsy of the crickets. The violent ringing of a bell in the dark hours of the night, even when one is as secure as a safe lodging and all the contrivances of civilization can make one, is, to say the least, an alarming disturbance. But to hear such a sound in this lonesome island, apparently amongst the trees yonder where they rose blackest to their topmost foliage against the moon, when it seemed as sure as sure could be that there was no living human being within God knows what distance of us, was such a trial to the nerves that I own to having hung in the wind for a space, amazed almost to a condition of semi-stupefaction.

The tumultuous harum-scarum ringing came to an end, and was succeeded by a melancholy tolling, as though there were a funeral some-

where under way. Bidding Miss Grant stop where she was a minute, I ran swiftly—I was a very nimble runner—to the head of the creek, whence in a few moments I had gained the beach on the north side of the island, a part that would have been hidden to us on the hummock by the forest. The pale golden light of the moon flooded heaven and ocean, and objects could not have been more visible had the effulgence been of the noontide. There was no sign of a ship hereabouts. The deep ranged with a bare breast steeping and soaking to the indigo of the sky; nothing stirred along the platform of sand that went twisting out of sight in a pearl-like haziness round the bend of the island, veering westwards. All this time the bell was tolling, and now I could not doubt that it was being rung in some part of the island, for as at the creek, so here, the chimes appeared to float directly from the black shadow of the central grove. I returned to Miss Grant, by which time the sound of the bell had ceased.

"It is no ship," said I, "be it what else it may."

"It is a real bell, though," she exclaimed.

"Ay, real indeed," said I, "too real for superstition to find a footing on it, though it is a chilly sort of thing to happen at this hour, amid this wild loneliness too. It needed to have been but a little less real to have thickened the blood with fancies of an enchanted island."

We waited, expecting to hear it again, but the ringer had apparently exhausted his merry-making fit for the time being, and all remained silent, saving the chirp of the crickets and the wash of the surf, with here and there a sulky croak.

Had I seen some figure stalking towards us out of the wood, I don't think, armed as I was, and free from all superstitious stirrings, that I should have been wanting in courage; but I confess I hesitated when it came into my head to penetrate the deep ebon shadow of the forest, and search for the ringer and his bell. In the wide glittering open, with the moon riding high overhead, a man rendered desperate by such a condition as mine might find heart enough for any sort of search or encounter; but the wood was as black as the

bottom of a well. Here and there one could just catch sight of a faint oozing of moonshine into the dark blot which the trees made upon the land and against the sky ; but it was easy to guess that one's entrance into that heavy obscurity must signify a groping rather than a peering bout. Who or what might be there, who could say ?

" No," said I ; " I'll not venture it."

" Venture what ? " asked Miss Grant.

" Why," said I, " I had a mind just now to explore for that bell."

" You would be mad to do such a thing," she exclaimed with energy ; " indeed I should not permit it," and she grasped my arm. " There must be a man in that wood," she continued, lowering her voice. " There must be human agency to set that bell going. Perhaps after all the island *is* inhabited, and there may be a nest of savages in that forest, who hid themselves on seeing us, and now dream of scaring us away by ringing a bell. Oh, I wish we *could* be scared away ! " she continued, as with a shiver she glanced over her shoulder seawards.

I shook my head. "No," said I, "I'll swear there are no Indians hereabouts. Had they existence, we were bound to have met with some signs of them; a canoe—a wigwam, or whatever else their dwelling-place may be called—remains of fires—relics of feasting. I should like to have a good look round from the hummock. Will you stay here? I sha'n't be gone long."

"Certainly not. I would not be alone for—" she broke off, whilst she stepped to where her hat lay and put it on, and I saw the glint of her pistol-barrel in her hand. "It is wicked to feel nervous," she exclaimed, "but what could be so unnatural as the sound of a bell here?—and then not to be able to imagine what dreadful creatures may be hidden amongst those trees."

We walked to the hummock, thinking much more of the sound of the bell and of the hidden being that had swung it than of the noisome or venomous objects we might by chance tread upon, and having gained the elevation, sent many a look round the sea and into the heart of the little island; but all

this side of the ocean was as bare as the northern quarter, whilst not the faintest movement of dark substance or of black shadow could we see, scrutinizingly as we gazed, on any part of the land. The night breeze had died away; there was scarce movement enough of air to breathe cool upon the moistened finger. South and east the ocean stretched, motionless as a surface of polished black wood, and the languid seething of the near surf was so delicate that it stole into the air like the moan of breakers leagues distant. We lingered ten minutes, then returned.

It took me some time to persuade Miss Grant to enter her hammock afresh. I told her that I would keep watch; that there was really no more reason to be afraid now than there had been before we heard the bell; that if the bell had been rung with the idea of scaring us, it was plain that, whatever might be *our* alarm, we also were held in fear; that if there were Indians in hiding, treacherously disposed, they were not very likely to arouse us from the sleep in which they could have

stolen upon and murdered or otherwise dealt with us as it pleased them.

"It is a puzzle," said I, "that we must wait for the daylight to resolve. Meanwhile rest is necessary to you, and you must please lie down. Trust to my vigilance, and sleep without misgiving."

Eventually she complied. I made her comfortable as before, carefully enveloped her hammock with the mosquito-net, then with a look at my pistols to see that all was right with them, I lighted a cheroot, swigged off a dram of brandy, and fell to pacing the stretch of sand, sentinel-fashion, close to the hammock, and keeping a bright look-out on the trees beyond, believe me.

CHAPTER IX.

A PIRATICAL LAIR.

The time slipped wearily and heavily away. The march of the moon was so slow that it was enough to make one think sometimes she had come to a stand. I paced the breadth of white sand till I was weary, then sat down, nodded, perhaps dozed, sprang to my feet again with a keen look towards the density of trees, which, as the moon floated westwards, stole out black and yet blacker, till the whole block of it was like a great staining of ink upon the liquid silver atmosphere behind, and resumed my pacing. Now and again Miss Grant lifted her head, bride-like with the drapery of the mosquito-curtain; but a time came when she lay still, and on stepping close very softly and peering, I found her sleeping peacefully, breath-

ing gently and regularly, and looking the very phantom of a lovely woman under the filmy texture of the curtain, with a sort of lunar twilight sifting through the umbrageous shadow to her out of the soft, golden-tinctured air where the open was.

It was as if the night were bewitched, so hushed it was; I never witnessed a movement anywhere save the black shapes of turtle crawling up the sand by the creek side, or on to the beach facing the east. How puzzled I was by the ringing of the bell, by its ceasing for the rest of the night, by nothing whatever having encountered my eye as a hint of inhabitants, by the dead repose in the little forest, with never a shadowy flicker anywhere about to define the flitting of a human form, I cannot express. At last, having seated myself to rest after a considerable spell of walking, I fell asleep, and so lay till I was awakened by the rising of the sun, and opened my eyes upon his blinding stream pouring aslant from three or four degrees above the horizon.

I stepped to the hammock; Miss Grant still slept, but so sweet and fair did she look that I

could not break away from watching her. My fixed gaze aroused her; she opened her eyes suddenly, and I backed a step, confused, and perhaps feeling a little mean at being detected. However, she awoke with too much wondering at her own situation and the strangeness of her surroundings to imagine my inquisitiveness, or to note the admiration which I doubt not would have been perceptible in me by her clearer vision. She threw the mosquito-curtain off her, and sat erect, and exclaimed, "Thank God, it is daylight!" looking in a restless way around her, with her hands clasped, her cheek with the hectic of slumber still on it, her beauty rich with the disorder of her hair, and the light in her eyes of transient bewildered thought that fired them like contending passions.

However, she had slept for three or four hours, and was the stronger and fresher for it. For my part, I felt so jaded and stale that every instinct in me clamoured for a plunge, so I trudged away past the head of the creek to the north shore, and spent ten delicious minutes amid the surf there, venturing however no further than waist-high; for whilst undressing

I had spied seawards, within musket-shot, a motionless black object, with a lean of it that made me fancy at first it was an empty bottle, but which, when it flashed out on a sudden with a wet gleam, I very promptly accepted as the dorsal fin of a shark.

I returned to Miss Grant feeling years younger, and found her dressing her hair before an ivory hand-glass, which she had hung against the trunk of a tree. Well, thought I, marooning brings about strange intimacies! Perhaps it might be married people only that a scrupulous mutineering crew would think proper to set ashore. But it was no time for fastidious feelings, quite the wrong sort of occasion for prudery of any sort, for any kind of modesty and decorum outside the dictation of plain good sense, realizing accurately the conditions of the situation, and admitting no other government than wholesome honest instinct. In fact you must be cast away with a girl to find out how artificial life is, and how much fairer the virtues show for being purified by stress of obligation into artlessness. I was for turning away, with the idea of searching for the eggs the turtles

might have laid in the night, but she continued placidly brushing the long lengths of her glowing hair, with a smile on her face as she looked at me out of the mirror; so I walked straight on, and set about overhauling our provisions with the idea of preparing a little breakfast for ourselves. I had taken a view of the sea from the north side, and now I searched the horizon on this, but no sail broke the shining line. At a rough guess I reckoned that the remainder of our private stores, which had been set ashore with us by the men, might with great care be made to carry us through another fortnight, helped by such food as we should find on the island. Indeed, this question of provisions did not very greatly worry me, for there was not only promise of a bountiful supply in one direction in the shape of turtle; there were cocoa-nuts, also oranges in plenty, green or ripe, on the north-west side of the little forest, as I had perceived whilst I sat drying myself after coming out of the sea. We could count too on a good store of crawfish, which fortunately I knew how to catch. There were iguanas besides, delicate to the palate as spring

chicken if properly dressed, though loathsome in their lizard form to the eye. No! the fear of starving did not visit me, but mainly I believe because the mind resolutely shrank from the contemplation of the possibility of our imprisonment lasting long enough to render famine imaginable. The consuming thought was, How if no ship should approach the place were we to escape? This consideration engrossed me even whilst my mind seemed busy in reckoning up the stock of provisions, and again and again I would find myself pausing in that work, with a dull sense of hopelessness that was a sort of distraction in its way, whilst I looked round the island wondering if it was in human ingenuity to manufacture out of it any sort of floating fabric to which we might commit ourselves without the certainty of perishing by drowning.

Miss Grant was full of the subject of the bell. She could talk of nothing else, and whilst we sat at our little repast of preserved meat and sweet biscuit, she was incessantly directing her looks towards the wood.

"There may be people there," she said, "watching us all the time. I thought I saw

something move when you had left me just now. We *must* find out to-day if this island is inhabited. The approach of the night will be intolerable if we are to expect that bell to ring again without knowing where it is, or what produces the sound."

"I shall explore those trees shortly," said I; "let me have your pistol. With mine it will give me three shots without obliging me to reload."

She drew it from her belt where it had lain all night with her. I thought I would try its quality, and taking aim at a leaf that stood in clear green outline against the sky, I pulled the trigger, and the leaf fluttered slowly to the ground. The sharp *ping* of the pistol was followed by many hoarse cries of paroquets, and a large bird broke like a shape of burnished gold out of a dense cover of leaves in the heart of the tree at which I had fired, and sailed away towards the forest, waking many hideous echoes with its discordant notes.

"An excellent little weapon indeed," said I, going to my portmanteau for a powder-flask, and reloading the pistol. "Pity it is not old

Broadwater's blunderbuss though. The blast of that bell-mouthed engine would be the sort of hint one would like to give if there be ears yonder to receive such messages."

"I will accompany you," said she; "it is inaction and expectation that keep me frightened."

"Lord preserve you," said I, "look at that growth of grass! You would need to be dressed as I am to penetrate it."

Indeed it was only too plain that nothing in the shape of petticoats and skirts could be forced, short of one's wake after a plunge or two becoming a raffle of shreds and tatters, through the dense, coarse, bush-like herbage which stood to the height of a man's waist among the trees. Indeed, the better to equip myself for this adventure, I laced on a pair of stout leather leggings, whilst I buttoned myself up in a short pea-jacket so as to oppose the trimmest figure I could contrive to the stubborn dusky confrontment of bush and guinea-grass. Leaving her standing and watching, I walked briskly towards the trees, with the butt-end of a pistol projecting from

either side-pocket, and Miss Grant's weapon in my hand. Piercing as the sunlight was, the foliage was so dense, the intermingling of boughs so thickly complicated, whilst the trees, moreover, stood so close together, that within half-a-dozen paces of the eastward opening of this little forest the green gloom lay beyond belief heavy. The obscurity brought me to a stand at least a minute, until the blinding glare of the open had gone out of my eyes, and I could see plainly. Climbers and creepers of all kinds, training and coiling like serpents, added yet to the dusk by filling the spaces between the trunks with a vague showering of crimson, star-shaped blossoms. After the heat outside, the atmosphere here struck almost chill; there was a sickly smell of rotting vegetation too, and nearly every tread of mine was upon something pulpy that yielded to the pressure with an ugly, juicy sensation as if 'twas soddened through with centuries of black miry damp; though maybe it was no more than a toadstool, or a frog, or a bunch of decaying fruit. Through a little cleft at wide intervals you'd catch a glimpse of the sea spreading brimful of soft blue light

to the sky, with a wild buzzing of insects coming in through the opening on a gush of hot air.

I moved with a vigilant eye, crushing warily through the quickset understuff, gazing at every tree-trunk as though another step should open a figure behind it watching me. I need not deny that I felt very timid. The mere cathedral-gloom made by this dense interweaving of greenery was almost preternatural in its way, when one thought of the dazzle that was just outside. Then again, even if there should be no human beings here to suddenly let fly at me with a spear, or arrow, or fusil, how was I to know what savage beast lurked in this wild tangle of shadows? Some of the snaking branches wore the very aspect of giant serpents writhing in folds off one tree to another. Here and there fell a smoky, golden haze of sunbeam, but it only deepened the obscurity of the leafy aisles; though had I had an eye for such matters at that time, I must have found something lovely beyond imagination in these dashes of soft radiance, bringing out some bunch of huge leaves, some cluster of green fruit never maybe to ripen, some scarred

and ragged elbow of bough, forking black through a drapery of runners and white-hearted flowers which looked to be falling like a cataract of green waters flecked with foam from the confused darkling roof of branch and foliage on high. Whether the sight of my moving figure alarmed the scores of birds amongst the trees, I know not; but the cries, pipings, hoarse parrot-like bawlings which broke from them, fell tormentingly upon my nervous ear, that longed for peace that it might hearken for any signal of danger.

I had been pushing my way forwards for seven or eight minutes without catching sight of anything more than the flickering plumage of some strange bird here and there, with the glint on it as of a self-luminous object, or as if it still carried the brightness of the sunshine it had been steeped in, when on my left, just past a couple of trees whose trunks rose to their branches with a twist in them which made one think of a pair of petrified boa-constrictors, I caught sight of a bell hanging from under a cover like the lid of a box, supported by two stout stanchions, the whole as green as the

wooden piles of a pier washed by salt water. "*That's* it!" thought I. "Come! here is discovery number one. It is a real bell anyhow!" and somewhat marvelling at the sight of such a thing, I made for it. The frame that supported it might have been a hundred years old, and the bell itself twice as ancient as that. The metal was green and bronzed with time and weather. I made out some faint lingerings of what had been an inscription upon it, but the characters were indecipherable. I opened my knife and put the blade of it into the wood of the frame, and it was like sticking a cheese, so damp and tinderous too was the timber, like soaked matchwood. A piece of grass line was attached to the clapper, and hung a foot below the mouth of the bell. It looked rotten, though I gave it a tug without parting it. To make sure that this was the same bell we had heard in the night, I struck it two or three times. The tone satisfied me. I also knew that Miss Grant, by hearing the notes, would conclude that I had discovered the bell. But who on earth could have rung it? I sent as penetrating a gaze as the twilight of the forest would permit

in all directions, but nothing approaching human shape or signs of human life was to be seen.

It was clear enough that this bell was seated in the very heart of the little forest, and as I was resolved that my over-hauling of the place should be thorough, I pushed on to the western extremity of the trees, till I could see the sea opening like a great blue eye over the slope of down to the ivory of the sand ; and then worked my way with a fight for every foot I advanced, so dense, spike-like, and briery was the tangle. Again and again I paused, always with Miss Grant's pistol ready cocked in my hand, and gazed earnestly right and left and behind me, till I presently came to where the trees thinning gave me a view of the smaller of the two hummocks, with the herbage and trails of sand rounding north-east to the spot where we had passed the night. The daylight here lay broad, and after walking a little I came to sheer sand, with patches of grass sprouting out of it, a clump of cocoas flourishing beyond, which made me wonder again, for I could see no sign of soil.

I halted a little while to recover my breath, and cleanse my face of the sweat that poured

down it. I could no longer doubt that the wood was as untenanted as the rest of the island. What hand then had rung the bell? There had been no draught of air to stir the weight of metal in the night. The alighting of some heavy bird upon it might indeed have caused it to sway, but there was nothing living with wings the wide world over to account for the several sorts of peals which had rung forth—the dirge-like tolling, the quicker beat, then the mad helter-skelter clattering, and then the solemn *requiem* chimes again. It was enough to put the wildest thoughts into the most prosaic brains that ever mortal head carried, and I must confess to looking backwards into the dim twilight from which I had emerged with a sort of shrinking feeling in me, and with a bit of wonder too that I should have found heart enough to carry me through the exploration with the stoutness I had exhibited.

I started to walk afresh to join Miss Grant, when, having made three or four steps, forgetful perhaps of preserving the shambling gait I had used in the high grass, the point of my boot struck something in the sand, and down I

went, measuring the whole length of me, the pistol I grasped exploding as I fell. I jumped up not a little flurried by this unexpected capsizal, and on looking to see what it was that I had kicked against, I observed a large iron ring lying black upon the sand. I thought to pick it up, but on grasping it I discovered that it was fixed to an eye screwed or bolted into either wood or masonry hidden by the sand. I was busy in scraping away the sand lying around about the ring with the sharp of my foot when Miss Grant arrived.

"What have you seen, Mr. Musgrave?" she cried. "At whom or what have you fired?"

"Oh," said I, "I tripped over this ring just now, and the pistol went off as I fell."

She barely glanced at the ring; her thoughts were elsewhere.

"I heard the bell; did you ring it?"

"Yes," I replied.

"What else did you see amongst the trees?" she inquired.

"Nothing else. It is some old ship's bell," I replied, "hanging at a kind of scaffold that might be a hundred years old, perhaps more."

"No man?" she asked.

"Nothing in the faintest degree approaching one, black, white, or yellow," I replied.

"But, Mr. Musgrave, *who* could have rung the bell then?"

"We may yet find out. At present I have not the faintest notion. But see here, Miss Grant; what is the meaning of this ring? It is a fixture. There will be some sort of trap down here, or I am much mistaken. If I had but a spade now!"

She looked again at the ring, and her interest came to it. She stooped and pulled at it, and then finding it fixed, recoiled a step or two and said, "We had better not meddle with it. The bell is wretched enough as a puzzle. Don't let us seek fresh adventures, Mr. Musgrave."

I mused a bit. "At all events," said I, "no harm can attend our seeing to what sort of arrangement the ring is secured."

There were shells of many kinds strewn about the beach, some of them as big as dishes, sharp-edged enough to cut a man's head off. I picked up three or four, and brought them to where the ring was, and fell to scratching and

digging with them, Miss Grant helping me. The shells spooned up the sand plentifully, and after working a little we laid bare what had unquestionably been some small ship's hatch-cover, about four feet square. On scooping yet a little at the lap of the edges, I found that this cover rested upon a timber frame, which in its turn was doubtless steadied by piles driven into the earth under the surface of sand. I tugged with all my might at the ring, but could not lift the hatch. Miss Grant, whose curiosity was now aroused, and who seemed willing that we should look a little further into this business, put her hands to the ring too, but our united efforts could do nothing with the cover. I had no mind, however, to be balked, and after considering a while what I should do, I pulled out my knife, and opening the saw-blade, swarmed up a tree to a stout, straight, marline-spike-looking bough that had caught my eye, and putting my knife to it, worked away patiently till I had cut three-quarters through it, after which I sprang on to the bough and came down with it in a fall to the ground. It was as good as a handspike. I reeved it through the

ring, using it as a lever, and pressing it upwards with my shoulder, I so jarred and shook the hatch-cover that it was presently loose enough to lift.

On removing it, I found that it had concealed a tunnel which vanished after a gradual slope of a few feet into utter blackness. Three or four rude steps fell in a flight to where the slope began, so that on descending a man needed but stoop his head to move clear of the roof of this strange cellar. I kneeled down to peer sideways into the obscurity, but saw nothing for the blackness there. An old faint, damp sort of smell arose.

"We had better put the cover on and go away," said Miss Grant; "there may be something horrible hidden in that grave."

"Nothing living, at all events," said I; "it is some old freebooter's lair, some ancient piratical hiding-place, or I am very much mistaken. That secreted bell yonder is a part of the equipment—set up to serve as an alarm, and to signal with, and perhaps to tell the hours too. I must probe that hole; there may be a discovery under our feet worth making."

"Mr. Musgrave, you will not be so rash! *What* can you hope to discover—that can be, I mean, of the least use to us?"

The sense of our helplessness seemed on a sudden to smite her as a shock; she drew a quick breath, and sent a yearning glance along the ocean line, almost unconsciously, as one looks up to heaven in a prayer. I thought to rally her with a stroke or two of idle fancy, and said, "Time was when many of these Bahaman Cays were the haunts of the picaroons; swift and tidy little schooners, loaded to their ways with the treasure of plundered galleons, came ratching to these secret verdant islands; the treasure was brought ashore by the beauties who had stolen it, and buried. Occasionally a black man was murdered, that his ghost might haunt the sepulchre in which the booty lay, and sentinel it against other maurauders. Maybe it was the ghost of a murdered black man who rang that bell last night. Miss Grant, I give you my word I am speaking the truth. The Goodwin Sands themselves have scarce gorged more wealth in their time than the pirates and buccaneers have buried in the islands and *costa*

firme of these waters, though I don't say *there*," said I pointing into the square hole that looked like the mouth of a well. "Yet when we have made our escape from this place, and are safe and snug in civilized quarters, should I on recalling this secret vault, endure to think that I had wanted spirit enough to explore it? Conceive of our coming across several chests down there crammed to the lids with golden doubloons, crucifixes of the precious metal sparkling with gems, chalices which might make a Jew kneel to the Sacrament for love of the beautiful workmanship." She smiled; I burst into a laugh. "No," said I, "my expectations are not so high-pitched. Nevertheless, I must take a view of that interior."

"Mr. Musgrave," she exclaimed, with a little pout and some warmth of feeling in the look she shot at me, with a droop of the lids instantly afterwards—the most womanly touch that could be imagined, with its flash of reproach and the pleading of the averted eye that followed, "pray do not forget that if anything should happen to you, *I am alone*."

I hung in the wind, for it grieved me to give

her a moment's anxiety. But unless a ship took us off it was certain that we must regard ourselves as prisoners for life, if we failed to devise some fabric for making our escape in. It was impossible to know but that we might discover something in this cave which should prove of inestimable value to us, even as a step towards our deliverance, and on my dwelling upon this and assuring her that I could not imagine there should be any risk in my taking a view of the interior, her face cleared, and she seemed to agree with me; but I could read in her that though she had the heart of a lioness, it fell short of prompting her to offer to accompany me. I doubt if there was ever yet a woman who would have found courage to have entered the black hole, even though her refusal should have cost her her lover. For my part, I felt no reluctance whatever, and yet Miss Grant was so much more heroical than I, in the truest sense of word, that recollection of the disparity tempts me almost into egotism in illustrations of my own humble doings.

I had a parcel of sperm candles in my portmanteau—useful articles to carry to sea in

those, as perhaps in these, days. I fetched and lighted one of these, and slinging it by a length of tape, lowered it into the square to test the atmosphere below. It burned brightly. Indeed my nose had given me sufficient assurance of there being nothing wrong in that way. Then bidding Miss Grant to remain where she was, and not to feel uneasy, I descended the steps, and holding the candle up, took a look ahead. I found myself on a shelving floor of hard sand and mould, walled on either side with stanchions and pieces of timber, running athwart into a slender passage, which, however, opened rapidly into an apartment, the roof of which was about a head higher than my full stature. This room might be about nine feet square. Beyond it, led to by a doorway that had in its time been screened by a curtain, as I gathered from the sight of a small metal pole bracketed athwart it, was a second room, black as any tomb, as you will suppose. The flame of the candle burnt bright, yet it was but a feeble light for the illumination of such an interior as this, and I found it difficult to distinguish objects. On the left-hand side of this first

room in which I stood was a low structure of bricks, which, on approaching it, I found had served in its time as a furnace for cooking. Over against it, suspended by nails driven into one of the beams which formed the transverse supporters of the wall, were several quaint, extremely old-fashioned cooking utensils, such as saucepans, frying-pans, a kettle, and the like. Two or three articles of a similar description lay under them upon the ground, whence they had dropped through rottenness of the spikes or timber, like over-ripe fruit. On the right stood a queer rustic-looking table very rudely made, the legs branching out like open compasses. I had seen such tables with villagers drinking at them outside old rural public-houses in England. On either hand were a couple of high-backed chairs. I approached the opening conducting to the inner apartment somewhat timorously. I was never a superstitious man, but there was something in the aspect of this dim, mouldy underground haunt that, affected as the imagination might also be at such a moment by recurrence to the mystery of the midnight bell-ringing, might well have set the

hair of a stouter-spirited man than mine creeping and lifting upon his head. I listened attentively; the stillness was unutterably deep, something to make one think of the silence that a man interred alive might *hear* in his coffin. However, I had talked somewhat big to Miss Grant, and perhaps was in no temper to be dismayed by my own fancies; so breaking from my posture of hearkening, with a look round at the shadows flitting to the movement of the candle in my hand, I advanced to the threshold of the second chamber and peered in, holding the light in advance of me.

There was some furniture here, and consequently objects sufficient to excite a passing emotion of consternation by the dark flickering, so to speak, of several kinds of outlines. I stood staring, and presently made the chamber out to have been a bedroom. A four-post bedstead, the uprights of which however had been cut short to admit of their erection in this low-ceiled apartment, stood opposite the entrance. The candle-light seemed to find a dull reflection in the legs of it, and on drawing near I saw that they had been gilt. It had been a

very magnificent bedstead in olden times, no doubt. The feet were richly-carved figures of mermaids, the posts of ebony, with signs lingering of a once gaudy inlaying. There was a mattress upon the bed and a great bolster, along with a huge, coarse, dark rug. Slung by straps to the wall were several firelocks of the pattern the buccaneers of the seventeenth century were wont to level, and the like number of pistols, all nearly of the dimensions of a fowling-piece of our time. There was also a small array of broadswords and hangers, some fallen, having rotted from the straps by which they had hung. I spied a small chest in one corner, of black oak, and walked to it, having by this time got rid of my timidity. I opened it—let me admit, with a pulse accelerated by expectation—and holding the candle close, looked in ; but alas ! instead of massive treasure the chest contained nothing more than a quantity of fish-hooks of various sizes, a ball or two of rotted cotton-thread, and three or four parchment-like rolls, which proved to be charts, of which the tracings were rendered indistinguishable by dirt and mildew. The side of this

cavernous chamber where the chest stood was papered, as it were, with a sort of loose hangings. I had not noticed this but for their swaying to the little current of air wafted by my moving the lid of the box. This drapery was of yellow silk, covered with strange devices wrought in black, but time or damp had obliterated so much of the figuration, whilst my candle gave forth so uncertain a light, that it was impossible to make a guess at the nature of the designs. Here too were a couple of black wood stools, the legs showing traces of gilding, and a circular steel mirror cut in facets, so tarnished that I viewed it for some time without knowing what it was. Whilst I was gazing around me lost in wonder, but with a tolerably clear conception of the character of this subterranean dwelling-place, my eye was taken by a faint reflection directly amidships of the roof, and on elevating the candle I observed that a large frame of glass had been let into the ceiling, every pane lozenge-shaped. It was indeed like a skylight on a ship's deck. I passed into the first room, and observed the same contrivance there. The sight of these

windows gave me an idea, and I at once stepped into the shelving corridor and mounted the steps, blinking like an owl at the brilliant morning blaze.

"Oh, Mr. Musgrave," cried Miss Grant, "I was afraid you would never return! I have been expecting every instant to hear the report of your pistol. What have you seen? Oh, something, I *do* hope, that will explain that bell-ringing last night."

"What I have seen you shall presently see," said I. "It is as snug a two-roomed dwelling-house as one could wish, a bit mouldy perhaps, but a tidier lodging than a tree anyhow. There will be two windows under the sand here. How will they bear now?"

"Two windows!" she exclaimed; and there was little to wonder at in her surprise either, for the sand trended smooth to the dense thickets of herbage, where the trees went huddling into the forest as though it were formed of the quicksilver which the metal dazzle of it—like the fiery points of new tin flashing back the sun—made it resemble; and it needed something more than imagination to enable one to

conceive of such a thing as a *window* having anything to do with this surface of coral, almost powdery, softness.

After pondering a minute, I walked to the spot, shells in hand, where I reckoned the window of the kitchen underneath to be situated, and fell a-scraping; and when I had made a hole about a foot and a half deep, the edge of the shell scratched crisply over something polished. This proved to be a frame of glass. Miss Grant stood beside me, looking on, scarcely understanding what I was at, whilst I shovelled away with a couple of big shells, tossing the sand aside as a child digs for sport on the seashore, until I had laid bare a good space of the skylight. It was easy work, for the admixture of soil was too trifling to give much density and weight to the sand; yet it took me near an hour to lay bare the first skylight. I found it formed, as I had previously conjectured, of the frames of some vessel's skylight, but of a vessel that had been afloat in an age when, as I supposed, shipwrights were here and there to be found willing to embellish the fabrics they launched with lozenge-shaped windows in the deck fit-

tings. The frames lay flat, like the cover of a hatch, solidly overlapping the edge of a timber casement. With the help of the handspike I had manufactured, I prized one of the frames out of its fixings, which had been tautened by wet running sand into a kind of cement, then with my hands tore it bodily up. The high sun struck full through the opening; Miss Grant peered down.

"It is a room!" she cried.

"Yes," said I, "and it will furnish us with the sort of asylum we stand in need of until the moment of our deliverance arrives."

"You do not intend that we should *sleep* down there?" she exclaimed, flushing to the startling thought, whilst her eyes brightened with the dread in her.

"You shall judge for yourself presently," said I, laughing.

"Sleep in such a hole as that!" she cried, with her white forefinger dramatically pointing downwards, and a fine imperiousness in the pose of her figure springing as it were out of a sort of passing indignation at my suggestion. "Why, Mr. Musgrave, supposing the man that rung the bell last night should discover that we

were underground; he might put the covers on these holes, and then—and *then*—"

"We should be buried alive," said I; "only there is no man here, so I am not afraid."

"Who rung the bell then?" she asked.

"No *man*, I'll swear," I answered, "unless he be endowed with some mystic power of converting himself into a bush or tree at sight. Indeed I hope we may not be able to find out who *did* ring the bell," I continued, sending a look at the ocean, "for I should like to be taken off at once, at this very minute indeed. But if we are forced to tarry we shall solve the mystery, depend upon it. There's another window somewhere to be cleaned, Miss Grant," I continued, speaking cheerfully, "and when that's done I'll show you so quaint and surprising a curiosity in the shape of a piratical lair, that if I had it within reach of the millions of Great Britain I should make a fortune in a month by exhibiting it at a shilling a head. But how goes the hour?" I looked at my watch; it was after eleven. "It is time," said I, "to take a peep at the sea from the hummock. Pray God some gleam of canvas may be showing."

She refused to remain until I returned, and so we went together. I must own to finding her most fascinating when she was most timorous. In her fearless moods she seemed to be withdrawn to a distance from me, so to speak; but her manner grew tenderly clinging when she was nervous. She passed her hand through my arm as we walked away, giving a glance over her shoulder at the dark square hatch upon the sand, with an unconscious pressure of her fingers upon my sleeve. It was strange that she who had sat calm in the presence of the body of the murdered mate, who had confronted with wonderful composure the most threatening and malignant experiences of the voyage, should tremble at a black hole in the sand, and at my proposal to tenant a lodging which would protect us at least from the dews of heaven, from the sting of the mosquito, and from the jaws of the land-crab. But may not one read of a field-marshal fainting at sight of a mouse? It might not have needed more than a spider on her petticoat to wring a wilder screech from Joan of Arc than ever the stake extorted. One is sorry to say

it—but it is true, nevertheless—that it is in the weaknesses of human nature that one finds its lovableness.

There was nothing in sight. I searched with a shipwrecked eye, but the brim of the ocean ran in an unbroken sweep of blue to the mirroring of the sun. The heavens were cloudless, not the faintest feather of vapour in the whole spacious dome from its azure at the horizon to its brassy central glare. The heat would have been unendurable but for the shelter of the wide umbrella under which we both stood. The faintest draught of air was stirring, sometimes expiring, to let the fiery buzzing of the island swing tingling to the ear, then floating afresh, hot as a fold of atmosphere from a furnace, driving the sound of the feverish concert back. The atmosphere trembled to the drawing of the sun; branch and tree and every spear of grass, the slim length of the cocoa to its tufted head, the plumed arch of the palm, the great drooping leaf of the wild cotton-tree, faintly writhed upon the sight, till you thought you could *see* the mass of tropic vegetation growing—with

many a crackling noise as of growths rent by the roasting glare cleaving the shrill, fierce humming with a strange and startling edge of sound.

Miss Grant brought her eyes away from the sea, and looked at me as we stood close together under the shade of the umbrella. "What is to become of us?" she exclaimed thoughtfully, without expression of alarm or dejection.

"We must trust to God and to our own energy," I replied, "and above all keep our hearts up. Some means of escape, if nothing comes from outside, will suggest itself. Meanwhile we have abundance of fresh sweet water, there is no fear of our lacking food, we have found as decent a lodging as marooned people have a right to expect." She sighed and tried to smile, but you saw she could get no comfort out of the thought of the lodging. "Our health is good, and one wish at least of yours is gratified—we are not separated."

I know not in what sort of tone I may have uttered this last, but I noticed that her eyes fell at the close of my speech, her white teeth

shone over her under-lip to the just breathless biting of it, and then she said in her purely natural manner, "And we must not be separated, Mr. Musgrave, until—until—I mean you ought not to undertake anything rash—such as exploring tombs, for instance."

I smiled and said, "A mouthful of something to eat will not hurt us, and I am pining for a long draught of yonder cold bubbling brook. Afterwards we will have another look at the tomb, as you call it. Only think of a kitchen ready-made to our hands! We shall be having turtle-soup to-morrow, and delicate fricassee of iguana. There are some plantains t'other side there, past that hump of green, along with an orange-tree or two, and with patience, Miss Grant, we may even yet see our way to a fruit-pie."

"Oh, dear, Mr. Musgrave," she cried, with an almost hysteric laugh, and an eloquent impassioned toss of her hands that could only have come to her with her mother's blood, "if we could but have foreseen all this in London when we were talking over the voyage!"

I fancy she read the thought that was in my

mind at that moment, and to rescue myself, I said, but perhaps too sedately, "It will make a thrilling story for you to entertain Alexander with."

"Ah, poor dear old boy!" she exclaimed, taking my arm as before, and we walked to the spot where the luggage lay.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNDERGROUND LODGING.

By two o'clock that afternoon I had entirely cleared the second window of the sand that rested nearly two feet thick upon it. I prized open a casement that the apartment beneath might obtain purification from the air as well as from the sunshine, and I then asked Miss Grant to step below with me and view the rooms. She had seen enough by peering through the skylights to excite her curiosity, and moreover to reassure her mind; and so she now let me hand her down that black hole from which she had shrunk with her eyes ashine with dismay in the morning.

The coolness of the atmosphere in this cavern was nigh as refreshing as a bath after the roasting glow up above, and the softened

light of it fell soothingly upon the eye, fresh from the blinding whiteness of the sand and the blue brilliance off the ocean, where the atmosphere was sheer effulgence, though the afternoon sun had carried his wake around south, away from the quarters we had confronted. Miss Grant looked quickly about the place, advancing to the doorway of the inner room with a hurried survey of the chamber, and then her manner lost its restlessness.

"Do you know, Mr. Musgrave," she said, "I expected to find that you had missed some secret way of getting out of this place. I felt almost certain that this was the haunt of the person who rung the bell last night."

"You are satisfied, I hope?"

"I see two rooms, and only one entrance. Yes, I am satisfied," she said, continuing to look round her penetratingly. "Have you lifted that faded silk hanging?" referring to the yellow drapery against the wall in the inner apartment.

"No," I answered, "but I'll do better than lift it," and so saying, I went and pulled it down. It was like dragging at a cobweb. No stag-

nant flag rotting in the gloom of an abbey's roof over an aged stall would have parted more easily to a pull. The wall the stuff had concealed was like the others, soil and sand, solidified and shored up by a great number of stanchions and transverse beams. Miss Grant now behaved as if she were in a museum. Her face was lighted up by curiosity, and she peered at everything with the liveliest interest. The daylight lay bright in each room, and the damp and mouldy smell was fast yielding to the aromatic air gushing warmly in, laden with the island's multitudinous voice, through the open casements. I overhauled the contents of the old black chest afresh, in the hope of meeting with some hint of the story of this queer dwelling-place, but found nothing to suggest an idea even. The charts, so far as I could make them out, were buccaneering maps of the Antilles and the Panama main, with here and there a rude, ill-digested, most deceptive outline stealing out of the grimy thickness of dirt and mildew. I stretched the silk to the light, but the figurations were as vague as they had shown by candle-light. The fire-arms were crumbling, rusty old

pieces, great curiosities no doubt in their way, as were the pistols and the hangers, and indeed every piece of furniture in the place.

"And you think," said Miss Grant, coming to a stand after the narrowest imaginable inspection of everything in true womanly style, and gazing around her with wonder unmixed any longer with apprehension, "that this was many years ago the home of a pirate?"

"Ay, no doubt of it," I responded. "A hundred and fifty years ago I dare say this was a very glittering and sumptuous interior. Look at the legs of that bedstead. Saw any one the like of such carving, I mean on so prosaic a piece of furniture? It was the princely decoration of some rich galleon's state-cabin, I dare say, and one need not shut one's eyes to realize the idea of a head like Cervantes—who, by the way, was an exceedingly ugly man—snoring on a pillow there, the figure concealed to the throat by some exquisitely-worked counterpane of silk. Here is enough to set the imagination off into a brisk trot. The high-sterned polacre, striking the glory of the westering sun from her windows into the dark blue beneath, is riding within

musket-shot of the beach; her captain, mate, and boon companions of the crew are here carousing. See them in their great flapping hats, their yellow belts, their big jack-boots, their spiked beards, and moustaches curled to their piratical eyes, roaring out some song of old Spain, with goblets before them filled with a vintage of which we, a debased posterity, can never know the generous, the magical qualities. The old villains! they drank all the fine liquor, and left us the gout!"

"Your picture wants a heroine," said Miss Grant, laughing.

"Oh," said I, "I have not forgotten *her*. She must be yellow-haired; some Saxon sweetheart, captured out of an English ship, bound shall we say to Rio, Miss Grant? She has exhausted the language of entreaty, wept her glorious eyes dim, and grief as she sits yonder is eating away her trembling little heart as she listens with a loathing ear to the deep-throated chorusings of the black-browed roysters, as they sit clinking their silver flagons *at that very table there*, perhaps! The Lord preserve us! what a brush has fancy—to one's own intellectual

eyesight, I mean—when her pigments are such realities as yonder bedstead, those high-backed chairs, those queer-looking frying-pans, in which many a hearty turtle-steak has hissed, many a Friday's absolving fare of fish has spluttered! But to be serious, Miss Grant, will not these rooms yield us the accommodation we require?"

She shook her head a little dubiously. "If we could remove that gloomy old bedstead—" she said.

"Oh, certainly," I interrupted. "A little hammering of it with one of those muskets should render it portable. Your hammock will take its place excellently. Then, with the skylight casement a bit open for the fresh air it would let through, and a shawl swung from that metal rod over the doorway, the room would provide you with as snug a retreat as any hotel could offer; whilst I should make my bed here"—we were conversing in the room which I must call the kitchen—"ready at a moment's notice to interpose, pistol in hand, betwixt that entrance which your presence beyond will render sacred, and the villainous bell-ringer, whoever he may be."

"You do not think of sleeping here to-night, at all events," she said.

"No, since I see how reluctant you still are. But your health is precious, and mine too is precious for your sake. A few nights of exposure to the damp of these moonlit heavens would, I fear, tell upon us both, breed a fever, afflict us with the ague, disable us by some sort of sickness, and leave us in a very bad case indeed. We have to get away from this island, you know; and if we design to achieve our deliverance we must keep well."

Her good sense came to her rescue; she perceived the truth of my words, and said she would do as I wished, only—not to-night. When that terrible bedstead had been removed the place would look more wholesome.

"Whatever I propose," said I, "is with thoughts of your comfort, your health, your security chiefly—indeed nineteen times out of twenty *wholly*. 'Tis a bitter, hard experience for you, and would to God I knew how to soften it, better still how to end it. But the thing looks us in the face, and we must meet it as bravely as we can. My part is that of

a protector. If I know myself I shall play it dutifully."

She glanced at me a moment as if she would speak, then hung her head to hide the tears which filled her eyes, whilst she extended her hand, saying, "I thank you—I thank you, Mr. Musgrave," just above her breath.

I never recall this strange wild time without asking myself whether I acted as a true, upright, high-minded gentleman should towards this lady, situated as she was, forced by stress of ocean into intimate association with me, at the mercy of my feelings and instincts as a man. I did my best. I know that my one whole-hearted desire was, she should never suffer an instant's pain, be sensible of a moment's grief, of the lightest stir of uneasiness, through this obligation of bare unconventional companionship with me. I could summon no better government of thought for my behaviour than this resolution. But then her own frank, fearless, beautiful nature helped me. Her very purity was like a meeting of my efforts half-way. A little too much of modesty in her would have constrained me

with a constant sense of embarrassment by which I might have been led into blunders. Indeed I have to thank her own heroic, honest nature for the successful accomplishment of my desire, that our association on this island should be as painless to her modesty as a woman as though the formidable conditions of our isolation, which forced us close and bound us, so to speak, together, had been as stringent as they were indeed relaxing.

I devoted the rest of the afternoon to dismantling the underground rooms; again and again however intermitting the work to repair to the summit of the hummock for a view of the sea, but without beholding the least sign of a vessel, though never could despair have rendered human gaze more strenuously eager and searching than mine. The task I had set myself distracted my thoughts; yet it was extremely depressing too. It was as though we felt there was no help or hope for us, and that there was nothing for it but to reconcile ourselves to our miserable lot, and effect the best settlement upon the island that could be contrived by persons who were almost wholly

without resources. I caught Miss Grant eyeing the aged saucepans and frying-pans with an air of mingled doubt and thoughtfulness, and then she presently made a little collection of them, and was going up the steps. I asked her what she intended to do with the things. She answered that she meant to clean them; they were not fit to use as they were. I looked at her delicate white hands with a movement of remonstrance in me, but then I reflected that occupation of any sort was good for people situated as we were, and that the soiling or coarsening of her hands would be but a very small matter indeed side by side with the desperate needs which might presently grow upon us. But it was with something almost of a laugh of bitterness that I turned from her handsome form as she mounted the steps to the open, and resumed my work. "A pretty leveller is the sea!" thought I. "To think of this stately and lovely lady, who ought to be drawing close to her sweetheart, and to the comforts and refinements of a sunny and pleasant home, scouring old pots and pans upon a desert island; with myself, a gentleman at

ease, forsooth! a Piccadilly dawdler, knocking an old bedstead to pieces, as though he had bound himself apprentice to some old rag-and-bone merchant, and furbishing up a residence which even a mole might eye with distrust!"

Nevertheless, denuded of my coat and waistcoat, and my shirt-sleeves rolled above my elbows, I continued to toil manfully, making very little account of the gloomy thoughts that weighed on me. With the stock of one of the muskets I speedily demolished the bedstead, carrying it piecemeal above, where I found Miss Grant seated, shaded by an umbrella, polishing the saucepans and other contrivances with a wet rag and sand. One showed bright to her scrubbing, and she watched me with a well-pleased face as I inspected it. The fact was, there had come to my mind the story of a party of shipwrecked people who had been poisoned by eating food cooked in utensils which they had found in an old house hard by the spot where they had been cast away, and I considered our sufferings already too lively to demand the supplementary punishment of a

deadly stew-pan. However, the kettle was of iron, and the other things of stout block tin, and so I went back to my work, leaving her to go on with hers.

I remember I was sufficiently silly, as I cleared this cavernous retreat of such grimy furniture as we did not need, to continue in some small hope of meeting with something unexpected. Must I confess it? I was weak enough to suffer myself to be haunted by a little dream of treasure. I was but a young man, with much of the boy still clinging to me. After all, this was a sort of adventure to make even an older heart than mine feel virginal with romantic fancy. A cave into which the light of day may not have penetrated for above a century—as true a copy of a piratical lair as the most ardent imagination could body forth—into which the dullest eye could not have peered without peopling it with a score of spectral things vital with the colours of imagination, and gathering a character of substantiality almost from the odd fantastic surroundings of dim silk and drapery, of a bedstead that carried one's thoughts to the great galleon with its bristling

broadsides, and its mast-long pennons; of cutlass, matchlock, and hanger charged with suggestions of the Tortugas, Panama, the train of mules laden with silver, bracelets of gold on arms of ebony, and the citadel ramparting store-houses of ingots built roof-high —why, I say, it was impossible for me, with such young eyes as I then carried in my head, man though I was in years, to dismantle such a retreat as this without the sort of hope that must have set me laughing had it been told to me of another. But I explored to no purpose. Floor and wall were solid; no hint of a trap-door, no sign of a secret hiding-place. Whether the discovery of a chest of bullion, or a sack full of ecclesiastical furniture in precious ore would have served to reconcile us to being marooned, I don't know; but on looking back I cannot but think that we deserved some such reward, and am still weak enough to imagine that had I hunted more diligently yet, I might have met with it.

I again examined the charts in the chest, with the hope of being able to make a guess at the name or situation of this island, but to no

purpose. Mildew and dirt had done their work, and the tracings were as indistinguishable as the black background of an aged portrait. I let the chest lie as it stood. When I came to look at the chairs I found them very finely carved, and old enough to have formed part of the equipment of a manor in Henry VIII.'s time. The part of my work I least liked that afternoon was the handling of the mattress. It was a great bloated bed. I laid it upon the floor, and when I had knocked the bedstead to pieces, was about to lay hold of it to drag it up above, when I thought it stirred as though something were inside it. It was mere imagination, of course, yet I own that the fancy so frightened me that I stood staring at it for some moments like a fool. Then I gave it a pull to make sure that it was as light as I had before believed, and not yet being satisfied, I jumped upon it, trying to make out if I could feel anything inside with my feet. This I managed so cleverly that I fell plump over the odd inflation of the thing just as Miss Grant arrived for another pan to polish. I saw her start as I got up, and toss her hands with a

brilliant stare of sudden fear, then she burst into a fit of laughter.

"Oh, Mr. Musgrave," she cried, laughing continuously whilst she spoke, and pointing to the mattress, "for a moment I actually believed it was a man that you were wrestling with."

I rose crimson with my fall and with the exertions I had been undergoing, and said, "I believed something was alive inside it."

"*Something alive inside it!*" she exclaimed, in a tragic voice, with her gravity coming back to her in a breath, and recoiling a step.

It was now my turn to laugh. "It's all right," said I, giving the thing a hearty kick; "it was mere fancy; but something seemed to move, and so I jumped upon it." I then seized hold of it to drag it up the steps, and I laughed again to see how she ran. She would have confronted a band of savages, I do believe, with a resolute face, but this mattress was too much for her. I did not let go until I had got it down to the sea, where it floated away handsomely and sank. It is odd how, in such a situation as we were placed in, little things will affect the imagination. I am sure that had

that mattress remained in the cave, I should never have been able to occupy, or at all events to sleep in, the place. I believe I could not have consigned a dead body to the deep with graver satisfaction at being quit of it.

There was no chimney to the kitchen, but on making up a fire of wood, dry grass, and the sweepings, so to speak, of these rooms, in order to test the furnace, I found that the smoke passed out freely through the open skylight, whilst despite the apparent want of draught, the fire burnt briskly enough to roast us a leg of mutton, had we such a thing. I should have been glad to take up my abode that same night in these secret chambers, for I could see my way to as comfortable a bed of leaves and grass, with a rug for a sheet and another for a coverlet, as I needed to lie on, with promise besides of escape from the mosquitoes and the cold clip of the land-crab's jaws. But Miss Grant's sóft shake of the head determined me to say no more about it. It was her humour to sleep another night in the hammock under the trees, and it was my duty to be near her. I thought to myself, should the bell toll to-night,

her mind may come more willingly to the underground shelter to-morrow. For my part it seemed like mocking at luck to lie all night with nothing but blue atmosphere betwixt the trembling stars and one's body, when there was as good a roof for one as old mother earth could supply close at hand. But he must be a clever man who can even dimly guess at but a portion of what goes to a woman's timidity and reluctance.

I was mightily glad when sundown came. The fierce glare of the day striking down out of the swimming brassiness of the skies, and flowing back in intolerable sheen, like an *echoing* of light, if such a thing could be, off the dazzle of coral sand and silk-smooth water, made a veritable anguish of the eyesight when clear of the shadow of the trees. The evening fell upon us sweet as a blessing, with its dewy richness and coolness of air, and the hush of the discordant voices of the island, in a pause between the ceasing of the cries and screams of birds, and the small, fierce, sultry concert of the insects, and the first notes of the crickets, and the sullen croak of the frogs. We sat or

strolled, as on the previous night, till the moon was high, talking of Rio, of what my cousin would be thinking, of the probable fate of the Iron Crown, of our prospect of escape, and a score of such matters. Once, on the sheer rim of the sheet of glory lying under the moon, we both thought we could make out a black speck, and I never could have imagined how wildly passionate was the desire for deliverance in us both—so smoothly would we talk of our rescue, so quiet was the face we had put upon our distress—until, as we stood gazing with our hearts in our eyes at the extremity of the silver wake with the purple gloom lifting like the banks of a river to it on either side, I felt her hand in mine trembling, and damp with the dew of an ungovernable emotion, whilst on my side my breath came and went as thick, dry, and difficult as though a poison worked in me. That it was a ship we neither of us could say. Sometimes we fancied we saw it, then it would go, then seemed to blacken out again into a tiny spot. So dead was the calm the lightest craft could scarce have floated the distance of a fathom in an

hour. There was something almost of a physical burthen to the sensibility in the profound, stirless tranquillity that seemed to come weighing down with the fine clear dusk of the night. You almost blessed the crickets for the rising and falling of their bell-like chirping, and bent the ear to the delicate ripple of surf, for the relief you got out of the soft simmering noise of it. But let it have been a ship or fancy, 'twas all the same to us. The spangled indigo of the dome went down with its stars to the lustrous sea-line, smoothing it there to a flawless rim; and Miss Grant let fall my hand with a deep sigh, and a sudden look of grief at me in the moonlight, for which there was no answer but silence.

However, partly with the wish to distract her mind, and partly because of the necessity for such a thing, I thought I would see if there were any craw-fish to be obtained; so first of all I cut a bough from a tree which I had previously observed to be of a resinous nature, and on putting fire to it found that it made just such a torch as I needed. I then fashioned a shawl into a sort of bag, which I requested

Miss Grant to hold, desiring her also to take her stand close by the wash of the water on the beach, ready to pick up and pop into the shawl such fish as I might have the luck to capture; then turning up my trousers to above my knees, I waded a little distance into the sea, not without some anxiety regarding my toes, for I knew there would be plenty of crabs hereabouts, big and powerful, with the jaws almost of a young shark in their gripping and cleaving qualities. The smoky flame of my torch threw a yellow illumination through the water to the bottom of it, and after waiting a little I was rewarded by the sight of several black objects crawling like lizards to my legs out of the darkness past the sphere of the sulphur-coloured radiance. I dipped briskly, and in a few minutes had chucked a good round score of craw-fish on to the beach, and as fast as they fell Miss Grant picked them up, till the improvised bag writhed to the movements of the creatures as though it were something living in her hand. She had recovered her spirits, and called out laughingly to me that some of these days she would endeavour to draw my portrait as I then stood,

for she could not imagine a more romantic scene. Romantic it was, I doubt not, and she meant what she said, spite of the touch of banter her cordial girlish laughter gave to her speech. To see that it was so, one has but to think of my figure, black to the moonshine on the water, spite of the yellow tincturing of it by the flame of the torch; twin shadows of me flung by the firebrand and the moonbeam slightly swaying on the dusky ripple that floated shorewards into a mere wire-like breaker, my companion's fine figure pallid in the showering of the silver light, but clear-cut too against the snow-white softness of the sand which went shelving up behind; her dark eyes nevertheless stealing out even to a brief gaze at the glimmering phantasm of her lineaments; the island background of huddled blocks of vegetation; the stars jewelling the fibrine outlines of the trees; the sweep of the land to the hummocks looking mountainous and remote in the illusive atmosphere, and then the smooth plain of ocean glooming out into the vast distance with a sudden arrest of it against the sky, and a stern bending round of

its confines that made the imagination desolate with the sense of irremediable imprisonment.

There was some labour in the occupation of dipping for the fish ; but the water circled cool to my knees, the breath of it too floated refreshingly to the face, and flinging away the smouldering remains of my torch I waded ashore brisk as from a bath and lighted a cigar with immense relish of the fumes of the tobacco. I dropped the bundle of craw-fish down the hole that led to the underground rooms, and sat for a long while with Miss Grant ; our camp-stools in the heart of the ivory whiteness of the tract on which I had slept last night, and on which I was again to sleep. Occasionally my companion would look a little nervously towards the forest. Now that the silent night had come, thoughts of the mysterious bell-ringing troubled her afresh. Since it was impossible for the bell to ring itself, she said, it must have been tolled by human agency of some sort. No bird or beast alighting upon or thrusting against it could have produced the varied ringing we had heard,

and consequently she was certain there was a man hidden in the wood.

"Why should he hide?" said I, wanting to reassure her, for some hours of moonlight and gloom yet lay betwixt us and the daybreak.

"For fear of us, perhaps," she answered.

"If that be so," said I, "would not he be mad to make his presence known by ringing the bell?" She could not answer this. "Besides," continued I, "where would he hide himself? I searched the forest pretty narrowly. 'Tis true he might have a lodging in the hollow of a tree, but you can't reconcile any motive that a man would have in concealing himself, with his lusty ringing of a bell at midnight—raising about the most alarming clamour that human ingenuity could hit upon."

"Then, Mr. Musgrave, you wish me to believe that the bell rang of its own accord, or that it was struck by some spirit hand?"

This silenced me in my turn. For my own part, I could not make head nor tail of the matter, though, spite of the clear expression of human agency that I had found in the *changes* of the performance of the mysterious bell-ringer,

I would have been willing to bet all I was worth that I was the only man on that island, as Miss Aurelia was the only woman. But it was not a thing to bother ourselves *too* much about. It was an odd ocean puzzle, which grew a bit wild with the deepening of the night, and the thickening out of the dusky shadows of the little forest to the westerly drawing down of the moon. But my mind was too greatly worried with other considerations to give it heed enough to render me restless on its account.

Whilst we sat conversing I spied the black shape of a turtle creeping out of the creek, with the moon sparkling in the wet of its shell. "I must have that lady," said I; "she looks but a tortoise, and a small one at that." I fetched the handspike I had manufactured that day to prize open the skylight casement in the sand, and then waiting till the creature had put a good distance between it and the water's edge, I made for it, and with more dexterity than I should have believed myself capable of, I slipped my pole fair between the flippers, and with a hearty spring turned the thing fair on to its back. I then opened my knife and cut its

throat, feeling as remorseful through the horror of the needful operation as a conscience-stricken murderer, despite my perceiving how needlessly inhuman it would have been to let the poor creature lie all night in the torment of its capsized posture, only to decapitate it next morning after all. It was a small hawk's-billed turtle, I believe weighing less than one hundred pounds, or I should never have been able to deal with it single-handed. I returned with a guilty feeling of blood upon my head to Miss Grant, and told her what I had done.

"How shipwreck—to call our condition shipwreck," said I,—"forces one's hand! I should have thought myself no more capable of murdering yonder creature than of slaughtering an ox. How much of what is ignoble, of what is purely animal, comes out of one in stresses of this kind! A man, to remain only a little lower than the angels, should be luxuriously fed and housed, I think. His vileness grows with his needs. The nature of beasts remains the same in essentials, whether they be pursy with food or mere ribs with famine. But bring human nature down to such destitution as an open

boat, for instance, expresses, without a crumb of bread or a thimbleful of fresh water, and how base, oh, how base it will show in its instincts!"

"And all this," she exclaimed, smiling, "because you have killed a turtle! Yet I dare say your appreciation of the god-like qualities of man in you would not suffer through your chasing a hare, in company with twenty horsemen, over miles of ground, or killing a long afternoon by shooting at harmless little pigeons." She rose. "It is too late to provoke you to an argument," she continued; "what is the time, Mr. Musgrave?"

I brought the face of my watch to the moonlight. "Twenty minutes past twelve," said I.

"Have you my pistol?"

I had it in my pocket. I loaded, primed, and handed it to her; she adjusted it in her belt as on the previous night, then removed her hat, and gave me her hand, as her manner always was ere retiring to rest. I pressed my lips to it in the old-fashioned salute, grieved to the heart to think of the hardships that had befallen this brave and beautiful girl, and deeply moved

too by the pathos I found in her uncomplaining acceptance of our sorrowful and seemingly hopeless condition.

When she was fairly in her hammock, I rigged the mosquito-curtain over her, and turned away from the beauty of her face, complexioned to marble by the transparency under which she lay, with a feeling that made me almost wild at heart for a little with the sense of betrayal of the trust whose obligation, confound it! grew more imperious in proportion as it taxed my weakness. I threw a rug upon the sand, rolled up a coat for a bolster, saw to my pistols, threw the mosquito-net over my head, and lay down. This was our second night on the island. I felt the solitude of the place and the dismalness and melancholy of our look-out far more keenly than I had on the previous day. There was something of novelty about our situation during the first few hours which worked with a little quality of buoyancy in the spirits; but that was gone, and there was nothing now between the heart and the crushing burden of imprisonment. The fire-flies swarmed in brilliant constellations, the tingling horn of the mosquito sounded shrill

against my ear, odd midnight notes of dreaming fowl broke into the silence out of the inland dusk, down upon the ivory of the creek side lay my slaughtered turtle, with a look in it of a great stain of ink upon the moon-whitened sand that importunately and unpleasantly sent my thoughts straying away to the murder of Mr. Bothwell and the ugly blotch on the cabin-floor. The brig, the mutineers, the loss of Gordon and the men, Broadwater's mysterious disappearance—why, these were things already growing dream-like, so heavy was the thrust this last experience of ours gave even to the freshest memories, sending the latest incidents reeling back into a sort of antiquity, till, on my oath, it seemed as long as twenty years ago since we had embarked on the Iron Crown in the Downs. How were we going to escape? If we lifted no hand to help ourselves, what was to become of us? Yet, great Heaven, I thought to myself, mechanically eying the soaring of a cloud of fire-flies till they looked to dance into the stars and make a green and silver whirlpool of the firmament just over my head, by the mingling of their phosphor with the diamond points past

them, how is a man to deal with timber which he has neither saw nor chopper to level it with? What sort of ark is he going to contrive when he is as destitute of all appliances for building such a thing as he is of knowledge of what to do, though he had the conveniences of a shipwright's yard within hopping distance of him?

I was restless and hot, and was in the act of sitting up with the design of lifting the mosquito-curtain high enough to bring a cigar to my lips, when the bell hidden away in the blackness behind us began to toll.

"There, Mr. Musgrave! There it is again!" cried Miss Grant almost hysterically, and in a breath she had sprung from her hammock and was alongside of me, with her hand on my shoulder, listening. The ringing was much the same as on the night before—first a slow and solemn tolling, making one think of some mortuary bell timing the melancholy pacing of a funeral winding along a cyprus-shadowed path to an ugly rent in the earth; then after a pause, as though the ringer had halted to refresh himself with a drink, a hasty clattering, a most alarming, clamorous vibration; then the dirge-

like chiming again, followed on by all sorts of beatings, fast and slow.

"Will you say *now*," cried Miss Grant, holding my hand tightly, "that there is no man there?"

"Be it man or devil," I exclaimed, "ghost or goblin, it is a riddle we must solve for our peace' sake. Wait you here."

"What do you mean to do?" she cried, still clinging to me.

"Why, since it is impossible to see, let drive in the direction of the sound anyhow, and listen for some squeal to follow, that we may know the ringing is not an hallucination; for I protest to Heaven, the incredibility of such a thing is enough to make one think one's self mad for hearing it."

She dropped my hand, and I walked towards the trees with a pistol in either fist. She followed me however, holding her own little weapon, but the dense tangle, I knew, would stop her presently. I had no intention of penetrating the wood by the road I had taken when the morning shone brilliant. If it were dark *then*, it would be blacker than

thunder now, which necessarily increased the astonishment I laboured under at hearing the bell; for unless the thing that rang it lived within a pace of it, its power of being able to find it amid that blackness was as astonishing as the sound itself. Yet all this while the chimes continued. Whatever the ringer might be, its mood seemed merrier on this than on the last night. It rang heartily, with a curious suggestion of enjoyment in the sound produced. The disturbed birds sent a hundred remonstrant cries, yells, and whistlings from the trees, which apparently merely increased the appetite of the ringer for his labour, for 'tis not in mortal pen to express the preternatural wildness, melancholy, and I may say horror of the sound of that secret ringing echoing through the island out of the central midnight fastness, and dying away in ghostly tones far out upon the silent sea. I was as angry as I was bewildered. The character of the sound staggered my doubts of there being a man there. It seemed impossible that anything but a human hand should produce such noise. Closely followed by my companion, I skirted the trees to that

thin scattering of them whence I had emerged after my morning's hunt, and where I had tripped over the ring in the sand. Methought from this point I could better collect the bearings of the bell. Miss Grant soon came to a stand. Her clothing rendered the growth impenetrable by her.

"Oh, if I were only dressed as you are, Mr. Musgrave!" she exclaimed, in a voice so charged with bitter vexation that it was almost like hearing her sob. "Do not venture too far. Be cautious, for my sake. What shall I do if I am left alone here?"

"I will not go far," said I; "stand you in this black shadow. In the haze of the moon you will be able to see anything that may run this way. Let fly at it, will you, should it come. Only please take care not to shoot me.'

With that I left her, and drove with drudging steps through the coarse wiry undergrowth, helped somewhat by recollection of the road I had taken in the morning, and aided also by the sound of the bell. From the whole area of the island the concert of the crickets rose in a volume of chirruping; the croaking

of the frogs was distracting ; everything seemed awake, and nothing could be imagined more confounding than this sweep of multitudinous noise, closing to one's very ear as it seemed with the notes of unseen things crying out of the grass upon which one trod, and from the near hidden trunks of trees, and the stoop of the dusky boughs overhead.

However, I had not advanced fifty paces when I found further progress impossible. There was no question however that the chimes came from the bell I had inspected in the morning, so I levelled a pistol at the blackness in the direction whence the sounds were coming, and fired. The trees all about me glanced out yellowly to the flame ; the bell instantly ceased ; but one had to *listen* to make sure, so deafening was the noise among the branches of the terrified creatures roosting up there. I levelled a second pistol, and fired again, with a renewal of the distracting outbreak overhead, rolling in a wave of discordant uproar, so wild with intermingling of tropic throats, with single near yells, groans, snores, gasps, and pipings, following as it

were in the wake of the rushing clamour, that the effect upon the hearing defies language. I waited a little, eagerly hearkening. The ringing had ended. The forest noises died away, and in a few minutes you heard nothing but the familiar croakings and chirrupings, chiefly out in the open. There were too many trees in the road to render it likely I had hit the ringer; indeed I had not fired with that idea. But I thought that whatever it was that rang the bell might come sneakingly my way, and I strained my hearing for any sound resembling the rustling of the coarse growth pressed by the foot; but nothing of the sort was audible, so I returned to Miss Grant, and walked with her back to where the hammock was.

Well, it was a mystery not to be solved by wondering at it. I own I slept but little that night through thinking of it, whilst Miss Grant next morning confessed that she had not closed her eyes.

END OF VOL. II.

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